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JAGEX
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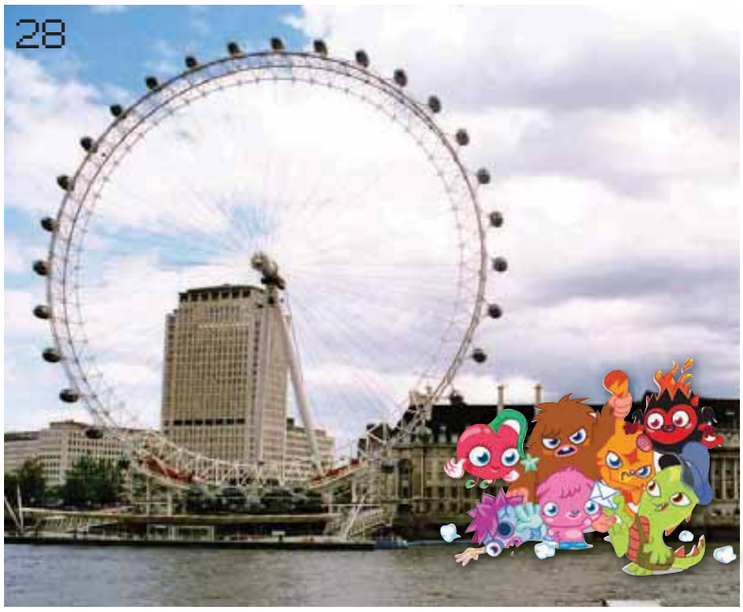

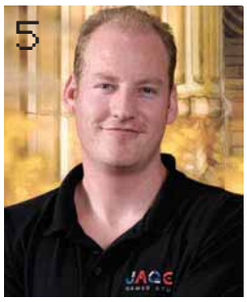

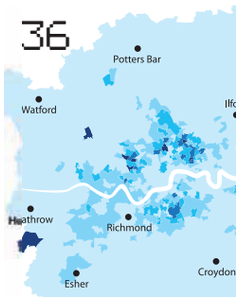

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ALPHA

ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

"The Langdell case seems to have bubbled along for a long time before anyone stood up to him…"
David Braben, p16

UK tax breaks: The debate continues
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Jagex: 'Studio collaboration will revive the UK dev sector'

British studios must share tools and tech to protect the future of national games development, says RuneScape company's CEO Mark Gerhard ● 'More studios will close', but the UK can remain strong if developers rise to the challenges

by Will Freeman

JAGEX'S MARK GERHARD has called for UK studios to work closer together to make the nation a world leader in game development once again.

In an interview with *Develop* Gerhard, head of the UK's largest studio, said companies should share tools, technology and other knowledge.

"I firmly believe that the future of games development in the UK can be secured through increased collaboration," said the CEO of the *RuneScape* company.

"Very few UK developers are direct competitors, fighting for the same users or creating games in the same genre. To remain competitive we need to take the lead, and share our tools and our technologies so that we do not have to reinvent the wheel every time someone makes a new game."

Gerhard went on to suggest that everyone involved with game development in the United Kingdom has a duty to pursue collaboration to prevent UK talent from moving overseas.

"It is important to stress that it's not all doom and gloom and I don't think we should all pack up and leave the UK," he added. "But there are major challenges ahead. I see increased competition, uncompetitive tax systems and a diminishing talent pool as the three biggest threats facing the UK developers.

Jagex's Mark Gerhard remains optimistic about the future

The Jagex CEO said he believes overseas studios' ability to create games cheaply serves to threaten the UK industry. He also expressed concern that some studios in Britain demonstrate a lack of agility with regard to reacting to the shift in focus away from traditional distribution.

In recent months Jagex has been very public in moving to seek to employ those who lost their jobs to the troubles affecting studios such as Bizarre in Liverpool; a move Gerhard sees as vital to protecting the UK development industry.

"With more and more studio closures, we need to ensure that we are providing the best opportunities for those looking to work in the sector so that the UK doesn't become a brain drain of development talent," stated Gerhard.

> ***"Very few UK developers are direct competitors. To remain competitive we need to take the lead, and share our technologies."***
> Mark Gerhard, Jagex

"While I expect more studios will close, the UK remains a fantastic hub of talent and we need to take steps to protect this," he said.

"Britain has a long-standing reputation for making some of the greatest games and we must continue to create unique, creative and world beating IP to secure a brighter future."

"Jagex is proud to be British. We are British through and through, and we hope that the UK development scene can quickly return to growth."

"If we can overcome these challenges Britain can become a world leading development nation once again."

Gerhard concluded by confirming that he is 'hugely confident' about Jagex's future: "We are in a strong position and have ambitious plans for 2011 which include expanding our games catalogue, not only with our own games but with the addition of some very exciting new IP's as well."

Editorial

UK studios come of age

WE RECEIVED a lot of angry feedback for *Develop*'s November cover.

The provocative suggestion 'will the last developer to leave Britain please turn out the lights' as coders flock to Canada clearly caused a reaction.

Though we hit a nerve, we don't believe we published anything inaccurate. The UK as a whole is not dying in games development terms, but certain regions are. Dundee has had a rocky year given the pressures faced by the likes of Cohort, Denki and of course Realtime Worlds – and Activision has cast doubt over Liverpool with its threats to sell Bizarre Creations.

And as we go to press we're hearing mumblings at regional hotspots in Nottingham and Brighton that the axe is coming down at previously ascendant studios.

On the flipside, just look at how quickly development teams have sprung up in London.

It's now the UK's premier games hub, which is remarkable given just two or three years ago most developers wrote it off as too expensive. But now it stands as the emerging champion of the UK.

So the UK in the midst of a transformation.

Why? It sounds wanky, but it's true – the social and digital tidal wave hit many hard. Harder, in some respects, than it was expected to smash into publishers and retailers, who have deep enough pockets to pay their way out of trouble in the short-term.

Changing habits in play and media consumption, along with different funding models and increasingly agile development methods are upending the scales for many studios and rewarding the smarter, forward-thinking few.

It's a far cry from when *Develop* debuted ten years ago this month, featuring developers rubbishing middleware and the expectation that PlayStation would be their best friend forever and ever.

So no, we're not sorry for last month's provocative content. If anything we're glad that *Develop* is as provocative, thought-provoking and as deeply ingrained into the culture of games development around the world as it was when it first arrived to support a smaller, less diverse industry ten years ago.

Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Debate: Are tax

Tiga's growling for it, Labour's lost it, the Coalition cut it, but is tax

NO

TAX BREAKS distort markets. That much everyone agrees on. Those who support tax breaks for UK video games companies point, quite rightly, to the distorting effects of the Canadian tax breaks, encouraging companies to set up studios in Montreal, Vancouver and elsewhere.

The Canadian government is prepared to spend its taxpayers' money to improve the profit margin of global multinationals to draw gaming talent into its regions. Should we follow suit?

I don't believe so (although I deplore the uneven playing field in which British developers are forced to operate).

The games industry is in a state of flux. Look at the emergence of social and casual games, digital distribution and streaming technologies – these are all massive changes to our way of doing business.

Tax credits move around at government speed when the games industry moves at internet speed.

Tax credits will encourage companies to build businesses and products that are aimed at the credit, not at the consumer market. They will drive a backwards view of the market, not a forward-looking one. They will stifle innovation and encourage companies to cling to outmoded business models, not innovate towards new ones.

Nicholas Lovell,
Non-executive Director,
Ndreams

YES

IF WE gained tax breaks for the UK games industry, we'd be able to compete on more of an even playing field with countries like France and Canada for the investment of large publishing and game development companies.

This will have the effect of directly and indirectly growing the games development industry here.

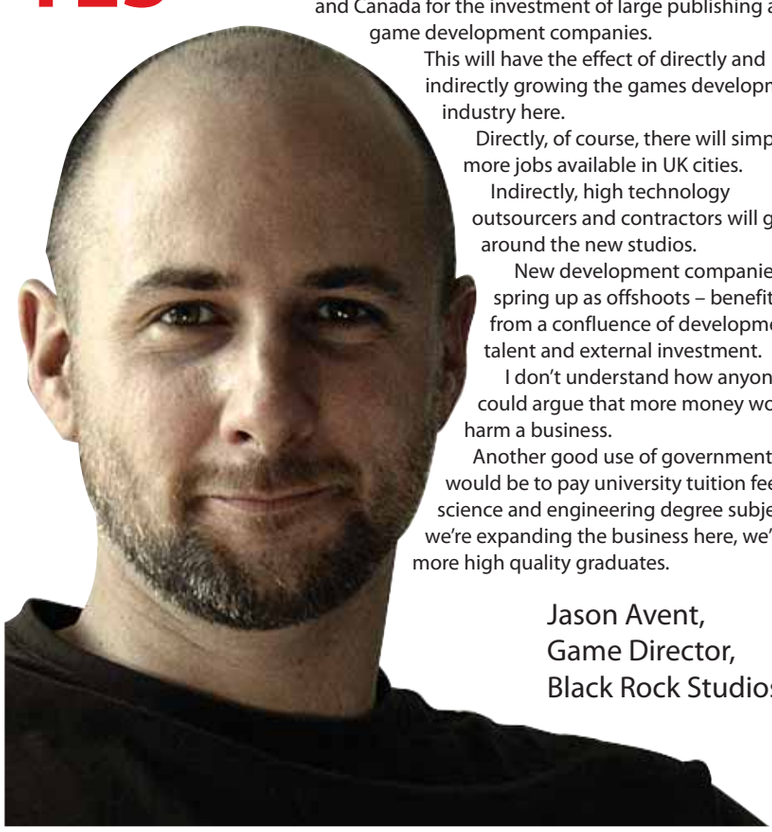
Directly, of course, there will simply be more jobs available in UK cities.

Indirectly, high technology outsourcers and contractors will grow around the new studios.

New development companies will spring up as offshoots – benefiting from a confluence of development talent and external investment.

I don't understand how anyone could argue that more money would harm a business.

Another good use of government funds would be to pay university tuition fees for science and engineering degree subjects. If we're expanding the business here, we'll need more high quality graduates.



Jason Avent,
Game Director,
Black Rock Studios

breaks worth fighting for?

relief important to UK developers? Here's what some of the key players are telling **Rob Crossley**…

YES, BUT

BY AND large I don't really approve of tax breaks but, as with everything, there are always exceptions and annoyingly, I think the games industry has become one of them.

It's not the UK industry's fault or the Government's fault that we are in this position. Other nations and regions are subsidising this lucrative industry in order to entice the big players to spend money there. And it's working. And we are becoming less and less competitive.

If the industry is going to thrive in the UK, we need to be on a level playing field.

It's counterintuitive to subsidise luxury entertainment when core services are being cut. It's only when you start thinking longer term – about IP creation and technical innovation bringing investment into the UK leading to more revenue, job creation and so forth – that it starts to make sense.

Nina Kristensen,
Co-founder,
Ninja Theory

MAYBE

THAT THE UK games industry is unfairly disadvantaged is not disputed. However I feel we are missing many other opportunities to level the playing field by lobbying purely on the tax break issue.

Government intervention in key industries is a fact of life. There is no such thing as an open market.

You only have to look at the effect of US military spending on technology to see the direct benefit to private technology companies in that country. Is it fair for competitive companies in smaller countries? Of course not, but that doesn't mean tax breaks are the only solution.

In many ways I feel there are easier and more effective ways to support our industry.

We should not be creating incentives to encourage large traditional retail publishers to set up in the UK. Instead we should look to enable current and future indigenous talent to excel in the new digital markets.

Support could come through greater commissioning from traditional broadcasters (BBC, Channel 4), a new publicly-funded games publisher, matched investment funds similar to the seed and co-investment funds here in Scotland, rate and rent reductions, security for debt funding and many others, including of course tax incentives.

Paul Farley,
Managing Director,
Tag Games

> ***"Tax credits move at government speed when the games industry moves at Internet speed."***
>
> Nicholas Lovell, Ndreams

> ***"It's not the UK industry's fault or the Government's fault that we are in this position."***
>
> Nina Kristensen, Ninja Theory

> ***"We should not be creating incentives to encourage large traditional retail publishers."***
>
> Paul Farley, Tag Games

> ***"I don't understand how anyone could argue that more money would harm a business."***
>
> Jason Avent, Black Rock Studios

Dublin Up at PopCap

PopCap's is looking to double the size of its European headquarters in Dublin. **Will Freeman** spoke to the studio's general manager Paul Breslin to find out more…

Left: PopCap general manager Paul Breslin

How does PopCap's European operation fit into the larger company?
We've been in Dublin now for five years. We started out with about nine people and we're now up to 60 employees here. We're looking to double our office in size in the next three or so years, and a lot of the headcount rise will be in our studio. We're looking toward social and connecting our users across multiple platforms. The future of gaming will be in the connectedness of the user experience so it's important to us.

At the moment in Dublin we're predominantly involved in smartphone development, so we are the centre of excellence for PopCap's smartphone work globally. Our iPhone and soon-to-be Android and Windows Phone 7 products are sold around the globe.

The studio here makes up about half of our staff, and that's what really differentiates PopCap games from other global companies in Ireland and across Europe, who tend to have a localisation arm. We do have localisation too, but we're are a little different in that we have a full studio here in Europe, as we do in Shanghai. The PopCap strategy is basically to recreate the Seattle operation in our regions.

> ***"We're a little different in that we have a full studio here in Europe. The PopCap strategy is to recreate the Seattle operation in our regions."***
>
> Paul Breslin, PopCap

How tough is the industry in Ireland? The country is going through a tough time economically.
We find the industry very robust here. We're growing and have been growing for the last five or ten years, both in the UK and in all of our markets globally, which have been very strong, particularly in the mobile sector, where smartphones are beginning to dominate. That's very much a focus for us here in Ireland.

But the mobile and social spaces are still in a state of flux. How do you stay secure in that kind of space?
Historically PopCap's strategy has always been multiplatform, so our games are available on PC, mobile, Facebook, in-flight, online, DS, Xbox, retail and so on. That strategy has been what's helped us keep momentum as we move into new frontiers such as social and smartphone.

The challenge with the smartphone is the emergence of new platforms. Our focus is currently on the iPhone, but Android we know will also be very important, as is Windows Phone 7, and the other platforms such as BADA, Memo and the Linux Platforms. Our goal is to get our games in front of everyone.

So does that include the likes of set-top and web TVs?
To be honest I can't really speak on that, but I can tell you that part of our mantra to get you games to everyone means we are looking at all platforms.

PopCap isn't afraid to cancel projects it isn't happy with. Why is that?
First and foremost we love games, and the quality of a game is paramount and always, always comes first. We're in a fortunate situation because *Bejeweled* has been such a flagship success for many years, so we can literally take two-to-four years to develop a title, and if it isn't fun, it will be shelved.

Peggle was started many years ago, and then it was stopped, only to be picked up when it was right. *Plants vs Zombies*, for example, took three years to make. It was pretty much ready at two, but George Fan the designer wanted an extra year to make absolutely sure it was ready and the best it could possibly be. The philosophy at PopCap is this: 'the game comes first, and it is ready when it's ready'.
www.popcap.com/job_opportunities.php

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WorldView

Our digest of the past month's global games news…

DEALS

Google has launched the Chrome App Store with over 200 games already available in HTML5. The likes of **Bigpoint**, **EA**, **Zynga** and **PopCap** have signed up for the service.

UK animation firm **NaturalMotion** has opened its own publishing division.

Metal Gear Solid studio **Kojima Productions** is the latest firm to use **Hansoft**'s project management toolset.

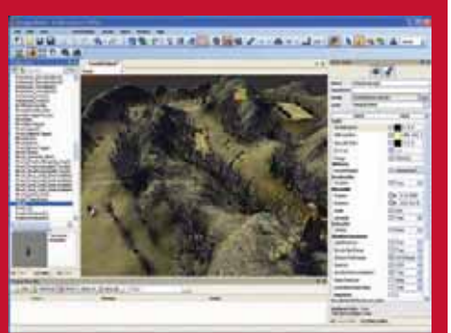
Game engine vendor **Stonetrip** has signed a new distribution partnership with **Axis3D** in a bid to make its Shiva3D tech a success in China and Taiwain.

Game engine vendor **Trinigy** will fully integrate the FMOD Audio Suite within its Vision Engine 8, following a joint initiative between itself and FMOD owner **Firelight**.

Social game firm **Vostu** has received an estimated $30 million investment from venture capitalist firms **Accel Partners** and **Tiger Global Management**.

Tag Games has struck a deal with **BBC Worldwide** to produce a *Doctor Who* game on both iPhone and iPad.

EMERGENT-CY AS GAMEBRYO ENGINE IS PUT UP FOR SALE



MIDDLEWARE FIRM Emergent is running out of cash and has appointed an agency to sell its technology and other assets.

A leaked memo from US agency Gerbsman Partners said the Gamebro owner was fraught with "working capital constraints" and was operating with a "an overly leveraged balance sheet".

The firm has abandoned its tech and tool sharing partnership with Australian studio Krome, though that in itself was jeapordised when, weeks before, the developer underwent mass redundancies.

Develop was told by the company that, at the time of going to press, it is operating "under the normal course of business".

Emergent has struggled of late. It announced a restructure in late 2009, and appointed a new CEO earlier this year.

The effect of the Gamebryo sale, if reached, is unclear. Emergent will "use its best efforts to make its employees available to assist purchasers," the leaked memo read.

www.emergent.net

USA

TORQUE FOR SALE AS INSTANTACTION COLLAPSES

InstantAction has closed operations just three months after the launch of its Facebook-meets-*Guitar Hero* game.

The Oregon-based company has been emptied of nearly 30 staff.

Its browser 3D engine, Torque, has been put up for sale – a move unfortunately timed as fellow engine vendor Emergent is also seeking a buyer for its Gamebryo engine.

Director of operations Alex Reid admitted that the group found difficulty in returning a profit during recent times.

Several workers had been chipped away from InstantAction in recent weeks as the firm began to buckle under the financial pressures, eventually leading to mass-redundancy with the remaining 24 staff handed their notice. All recieved their final week's pay, according to local reports.

The studio's final title, *InstantJam*, was demonstrated at E3 as plastic guitar game that sought the sweet-spot between the virility of Facebook games and the popularity of music titles.

"Today, InstantAction informed employees that it will be winding down operations," manager Eric Preisz said in a statement.

"While we are shutting down the InstantAction.com website and InstantJam game, Torquepowered.com will continue to operate," he added.

www.torquepowered.com

IRELAND

DEBT-RIDDEN IRELAND OFFERS €500K GAME FUND

The Irish Government will still invest €500,000 in tech start-ups despite emergency measures that will transform its economic landscape.

EU members will provide Ireland a €67 billion loan bailout to help weather a massive banking crisis. The Irish government will in turn initiate an extraordinary four-year plan of spending cuts and tax rises, intended to save the country €15 billion.

Both initiatives have sparked debate, criticism and protests, yet the Irish government will still launch a €500,000 fund designed to assist technology-driven start up companies get off the ground.

Known as 'The Internet and Games Competitive Start Fund', the scheme is said will provide "critical early stage funding" to various game and tech firms.

Ten Irish companies in the internet and games business can apply for "an investment of €50,000 for a 10 per cent equity stake."

www.enterprise-ireland.com/igcsf

SWEDEN/USA

ZENIMAX IN BUYOUT SPREE

ZeniMax Media has acquired MachineGames, the Swedish outfit founded last year by the founding members of Starbreeze Studios.

MachineGames CEO Jerk Gustafsson said working with fellow Zenimax subsidiary id Software was a "tremendous opportunity. MachineGames has assembled a dedicated team that has extensive experience working together to produce quality games," he said.

"We are excited to create a new AAA title for gamers on id Tech 5 that will push the game development envelope."

The deal continues Zenimax's fierce rush of studio buyouts, which this year included the purchase of Shinji Mikami's Tokyo-based start-up Tango, and French unit Arkane Studios.

Zenimax also owns Bethesda Softworks and *Doom* studio id Software.

www.zenimax.com

CANADA

OH BEHAVE, A2M IS WIPED

The largest independent studio in Canada has rebranded itself with a new mission to break into the nascent digital markets – and rid itself of a somewhat cheeky name.

Artificial Mind and Movement – formerly abbreviated with the (trust us) NSFW search term 'A2M' – has been rechristened as Behaviour Interactive.

The *Wet* (stop giggling) and *Naughty Bear* firm will still take on contract work from publishers, yet is hunting for opportunities in the self-publishing online space.

"*Angry Birds* is a good example of our objectives," said CEO Remi Racine in a wide-ranging interview with Develop-Online.net.

www.bhvr.com

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Our online resource features news, analysis and commentary posted daily, and is available via the web, mobile, RSS and daily email and news alert blasts.

BUYERS 'LINE UP FOR BIZARRE RESCUE BID'

STAFF AT renowned Liverpool studio Bizarre Creations have spoken of an emotional rollercoaster of closure threats and encouraging signs they could yet be saved from mass layoffs.

Activision last month put the livlihoods of around 200 staff on the line by announcing it may sell off the *Project Gotham Racing* developer.

The publisher said "the fundamentals of the racing genre have shifted considerably", and admitted that Bizarre's 2010 racing title *Blur* underperformed commercially.

The next morning Develop heard from studio sources that job cuts were "highly likely" – yet, by the afternoon, the mood had lifted.

An insider explained that studio management held a midday meeting and "told us that there's now multiple parties interested in buying" the firm.

The fate of Bizarre is still undecided. Its staff have been placed on a 90-day consultation period, in accordance with UK law.

UK studios Jagex and Codemasters held recruitment events at Liverpool in the days that followed, both companies said, in a bid to hire wantaway staff at Bizarre.

bizarrecreations.com

USA

ZYNGA ACQUIRES NEWTOY IN NEW MOBILE FRONTIER

Social gaming giant Zynga has purchased Texas-based *Words With Friends* developer Newtoy, the group has confirmed.

Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed. Speaking at a *Develop*-attended conference call, Zynga's vice president of mobile, David Ko, said the purchase of Newtoy represented what was the beginning of a new era for the *Farmville* developer.

"It has become increasingly clear that mobile is the next great frontier in social gaming," he stated.

Farmville on the iPhone, Zynga's first big push into the smartphone market, was said to be a litmus test on the potential of the smartphone social games market.

"In the last five months, *Farmville* on the iPhone has been downloaded over 7 million times," Ko said.

"We have more than ten million people per month accessing games on a mobile device."

Zynga is "only getting started" on its mobile push, according to Ko.

www.zynga.com

UK

ONLINE BLITZ FOR INDIES

Blitz Games Studios has unveiled plans to launch a new store and online forum for its underground indie games community.

IndieCity.com is described by its project leader Chris Swan as "a new portal we're building, aiming to be the number 1 place for all things indie games".

A statement posted on the IndieCity.com website read: "We're aiming to build the online destination for everything to do with indie games. We want to bring together developers, gamers and press to make IndieCity the one stop shop to find, download, talk about and buy these games that are being made by so many talented people".

www.indiecity.com

UK

AXE FALLS ON UBISOFT REFLECTIONS

Up to 20 staff at Newcastle-based Ubisoft Reflections could be leaving the firm as part of a wider restructuring.

This number includes several members of the studio's senior development team.

According to a Develop source at the company, staff were called into an office last month and informed of the situation.

"We weren't given names, but [Ubisoft] took some people into a separate office after the meeting, gave them a letter and took them out of the building. That was it," the source explained, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

A Ubisoft spokesperson later confirmed that 19 people could either be made redundant or not have contracts renewed, while staff at Ubisoft Montréal will continue to assist on the next *Driver*.

www.ubi.com/uk

SAY WHAT?!?

"'Will the last developer to leave Britain please turn out the lights'. Well, says it all really."

*Games veteran **Ian Livingstone** quotes Develop #111's front page to a packed crowd at LGC. It turned out to be one of the least vitriolic responses...*

"You spout crap about how the UK sucks and elsewhere is brilliant. You're scum."

*...An **anonymous** reader's slightly different view on Develop-Online.net. Apparently, Develop is exaggerating the scale of problems facing the UK....*

"We are exploring our options regarding the future of Bizarre, including a potential sale of the business."

*...thirteen days later, and a statement from **Activision PR** as some 200 staff from Liverpool studio Bizarre Creations go on three months' consultation...*

"There were people from all levels. Some were high up, people who have been at the company for a very long time."

*...and another thirteen days later, a **anonymous source** speaks to Develop about layoffs at Newcastle-based Ubisoft Reflections.*

ANATOMY OF A BLOCKBUSTER

Our monthly dissection of a recent hit game...

Halo: Reach

PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios
DEVELOPER: Bungie
FORMAT: Xbox 360
CHART SUCCESS: At the last count it raked in $350m of revenue; $200m in the first 24 hours
www.bungie.com

Bungie's impressive farewell to its epoch-defining IP played like a frenetic series 'best-of'

THE SENSATION

Nine years is a long time in games development, and many Xbox launch titles are blurry memories today.

One, however, did pretty well. When *Halo: Combat Evolved* arrived in 2001, many were unsure about a Microsoft console. Today, you would be hard pressed to find anyone willing to own up to that concern.

Halo, along with the culture that grew around it, contributed in no small part to Xbox's massive success. Even among those with no games experience, the name is evocative of the platform. It has been nine years since Xbox came blinking into the light of day. Six games and an Xbox 360 later, and the *Halo* franchise has become part of the console's legend.

THE GAME

Halo: Reach is a prequel with an outcome fans have known for years. Riffing off modern science fiction like the remade *Battlestar Galactica* (unlike *Alien* and Larry Niven novels in the main series), the plot centres on the defense of the planet Reach against overwhelming alien odds. It is a tale of disaster, and a Spartan supersoldier team entrusted with the fate of humanity.

Singleplayer gameplay is familiar to anyone who has ever played an FPS *Halo* title; a deceptively simple selection of ordnance can be deployed against alien hordes in entertaining ways across beautifully designed and expansive sci-fi locales. The introduction of special abilities like sprinting and jet-packs has polished the classic experience to a shine.

All of which is backed-up by one of the most well-honed multiplayer modes going, developed over the course of the *Halo* franchise into the deep community experiences it is today.

THE STUDIO

Bungie, through a largescale multimedia engagement with its gamers and a well developed, 'irreverent' persona, has redefined the developer/audience relationship and the culture of the triple-A studio.

Seventh Column, the Bungie community of staff and fans that has helped many charities, emptimises that trend, and has become a great boon to the developer's reputation as a company that cares.

This human interest has seen the studio evolve into a cultural quantity as relevant as the titles it develops. Its increasingly unique position as a secure independent studio with triple-A output also makes it hot property. People cared when, this April, Bungie announced a 10-year multi-platform publishing deal with Activision.

UNIQUE SELLING POINT

A mutable area over time, the initial draw of *Halo* was to chance play an FPS of near-PC quality on consoles.

Today, *Halo* stands in contrast to its rivals by way of its sci-fi plot and character abilities. In a market thick with first-person shooters aiming to present as bleak and realistic a portrayal of war as possible, *Halo: Reach* is a breath of fresh, otherworldly air.

Why would you want to watch your character get shot by a corrupt US General when you can watch him get eviscerated by an eight-foot alien in purple body armour?

WHY IT WORKS

There is no esoteric undercurrent of meaning to be found in *Halo: Reach*. It is a dumb joy in the very best sense, and there is something to be celebrated in that.

While the dramatic loading sequence of interstellar long shots building to a zoom onto the eponymous planet – accompanied by a Taiko drums score – implies some kind of higher plot agenda, it's best not to spend too long looking for one. There is a fun, albeit a little daft, plot on offer, but *Reach*'s campaign is about killing stuff.

Reach's multiplayer is about killing stuff while engaging in matriarchal bad-mouthing. These pleasures are primal, and occasionally lower than that. They appeal to everybody, regardless of how readily they admit it.

TRY IT YOURSELF

The singular, giddy pleasure that is gleaned from turning a room full of hateful alien bad guys into so much steaming space-gizzards is one unlikely to diminish any time soon.

Try this – in the distant future, an Earth spy known as Tom XX-7 vanishes while investigating reports of alien-collusion on Jupiter. One of his 'sisters', May XY-3, is set to find out what happened, and to silence any alien cells discovered in the process.

That took seconds. Now you do it. Make sure you include some very big guns.

develop

@stonetrip, ShiVa3D 1.9 is out... can we develop 3D games using C++ or Cocoa now ?

about 1 hours ago via TweetDeck

@developonline, sure ! And you can also integrate plugins like Bullet Physics, Allegorithmic's Subtance, ARToolkit, etc...

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//COMMENT: BUSINESS

Science Friction

by **Rick Gibson**, Games Investor Consulting

Above: The Amazon warehouse. The online retailer has reportedly learned that a 100 microsecond increase in page load times can reduce sales by one per cent

HOW MANY steps does it take for an average customer to choose, buy and consume a retail game? Five? Ten? 15? With so many opportunities to be put off or distracted by other games, entertainment or activities, it's a tough job steering players towards purchase.

This month, I'm going to graze the surface of a vast new discipline for self-publishing games companies: managing friction.

Friction means anything that gets between your game's promotion and its purchase and enjoyment by your customers. Over decades, retail marketers have honed their skills at smoothing this inherently high friction path towards the till. Managing friction is a very different science for network businesses, and one which today defines some of the industry's most successful companies.

RUB THE WRONG WAY

Selling games direct to players over networks clearly reduces some kinds of friction but certainly does not eliminate them all. In fact, our sensitivity to friction is amplified online. Whether it's a download delay, a registration process, a poorly crafted marketing message or a credit card form, friction can dramatically reduce your sales. Friction equals lost customers and thus revenues. Many online gaming companies invest significantly in processes to guide players from initial interest to spending money as smoothly as possible. Optimising that funnel is a highly granular, iterative and data-heavy process aimed at converting players to the next stage of their engagement with a game.

Friction has long been an environmental hazard for online marketers – the venerable click-through rate is just one friction metric. Every budding online marketer soon discovers you need to test which 'call to action' works best. Social games companies reduce friction by testing phrasing, landing pages and all graphical aspects of their marketing, homing in from multiple variations to those that work best.

> ***"How many people clicking on a 'play now' button are actually then forced to endure multiple other screens and forms before getting to the fun?"***

Each call to action is optimised for different kinds of target customer and marketing channel. Trial and error will reveal what works for AdWords may fail as copy for an affiliate promotion, for example.

Analytics underpin this discipline, allowing practitioners to dice marketing, customers and on-site activity into workable segments, which are then analysed for return on investment.

Each of the many channels and campaigns will perform at different levels depending on the target audience. One major driver behind the success of social networks is that they can dramatically reduce the friction of shopping from a catalogue by getting players to recruit friends. However, finding staff sufficiently skilled at the continual process of evaluating the data is challenging.

FICKLE FINGERS

The friction generated by people's stunning impatience online requires a range of technical solutions. Amazon reportedly discovered that a 100 microsecond increase in load time decreased sales by one per cent. Google is said to have found that a half second delay in loading a page resulted in a 20 per cent fall in traffic. With load speed fundamentally affecting sales of all online products, most online games companies dealing with high traffic volumes have turned to the cloud to decrease overall response time.

Streaming games services are built on technology designed to reduce the friction of low bandwidths and slow game downloads. Flash's 95 per cent-plus (i.e. low friction) installed base is today driving a significant proportion of online gaming whereas games dependent on plug-ins can force 99 per cent of web users to download and install clients over multiple clicks which most will fail to complete. Plug-in and other download-based online games clearly can work but they do so only for the most motivated players, often the hardcore minority who will tolerate the higher friction.

The bad news is that your work is not finished once someone arrives on your site and accesses your game. In fact, the real effort has only just started. We've seen data from companies that have won or purchased massive traffic only to lose almost all of it before people even start playing. Some are basic errors in design.

How many people clicking on a 'play now' button are actually then forced to endure multiple other screens and forms before getting to the fun? Identifying and subsequently fixing points of friction will require solid analytics to monitor most interactions between player and game for the entire customer lifetime, as well as design flexibility to provide solutions.

There are many other types of friction, some of them more deadly but others that are, counter-intuitively, beneficial; but here we can only scratch the surface of the data and knowledge we have accumulated on this huge subject. The bottom line is that minimising friction means increasing revenues for many types of game service, and companies that successfully manage friction are being snapped up.

Rick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries. **www.gamesinvestor.com**

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//COMMENT: OPINION

Why I hate 'trolls'

by **David Braben**, Frontier Developments

Right: EA's Mirror's Edge fought the good fight in more ways than one

OF COURSE I mean 'patent trolls' and 'trademark trolls' – the term given to people who sit on a patent or trademark like a troll under a bridge; they sit for ages in their dark holes waiting for an unwary passer-by, sucking them dry of money when they do.

Every few years, a particularly egregious case comes to light. There was the infamous '690 patent case, where a troll claimed a patent on 3D graphics. Yes, not some clever technique, but the whole thing – or at least that seemed to be the impression they were giving. In fact, if you read the original patent, it was for a technique for communication of 3D data from a 'mainframe' to a 'workstation', but the title of the patent sounded misleadingly broad. Although initially the claimants wanted preposterous settlements, these were reduced dramatically, so many settled. It was particularly galling that these trolls still benefited from their actions.

ON THE EDGE

This year we have seen the high profile case with Tim Langdell and his Edge trademark. It is surprising to me how many people appear to have paid up, but I suppose he became expert at the process. I am delighted that EA stood their ground over *Mirror's Edge* and have made a conspicuous example of him. Hopefully other trademark and patent trolls will now think twice.

The reason such trolls exist is the legal process to defend against them is very expensive, both in legal costs, but more importantly in time – if it stops sales of your game (or whatever), it can threaten your very livelihood, and so the damages claimed are often tuned to be a little less costly than fighting would be. When a large corporation like EA stands and fights it benefits us all, and we should applaud them for it.

I was an expert witness in the '690 patent case, though it never went as far as court, and this opened my eyes to just how many patents there are out there for really obvious things. It looks like *Elite* could be claimed to have violated quite a few – including the '690 patent – even though it pre-dated them, and the source code to *Elite* was lodged with the Library of Congress. Unfortunately being first does not stop it being a violation, but it can be used as a defence, and to unravel the patent – an expensive process.

Frankly these patents should not have been granted in the first place. Similar issues exist with trademarks. The biggest beneficiaries are the lawyers.

INVENTING TRUTH

When patents are debated on TV or radio, usually some inventor, like Sir James Dyson, is wheeled out to defend them, painting the picture of a hard-working Fred-in-a-shed coming up with an amazing invention, and using the patent to protect him from 'big business' that might otherwise muscle in and take the fruits of his labours. The truth is often very different. The troll looks at techniques, obvious to those already in the industry, and frequently already in use, and gets a patent on them, drawn as broadly as possible but keeps quiet until it is about to expire, drafting it in such a way that a search will not pick it up. The irony is that patents were created to protect the individual inventor, but in practice you need to have deep pockets to be able to afford to fight them so, in our industry, it is that same indie that is most vulnerable.

> ***"In my opinion, as an industry we failed in the Langdell case. This seems to have bubbled along for a very long time before anyone stood up to him."***

In my opinion, as an industry we failed in the Langdell case. This seems to have bubbled along for a very long time before anyone stood up to him. Perhaps Langdell's spiritual successor is at work already?

If so, let's shine a spotlight on it, too, and state our positions publically. This way, the next prospective troll, with the next silly patent or overly broad claims for their trademark, might just think twice. We will all benefit in the long run.

David Braben is the founder of Cambridge-based Frontier Developments. Best known as the co-creator of *Elite*, Braben has contributed to, designed or overseen a number of other projects including *Frontier: Elite II*, *Dog's Life*, *Thrillville, LostWinds* and *Kinectimals*. Frontier is currently developing his next title, *The Outsider*. He is also closely involved with Skillset. **www.frontier.co.uk**

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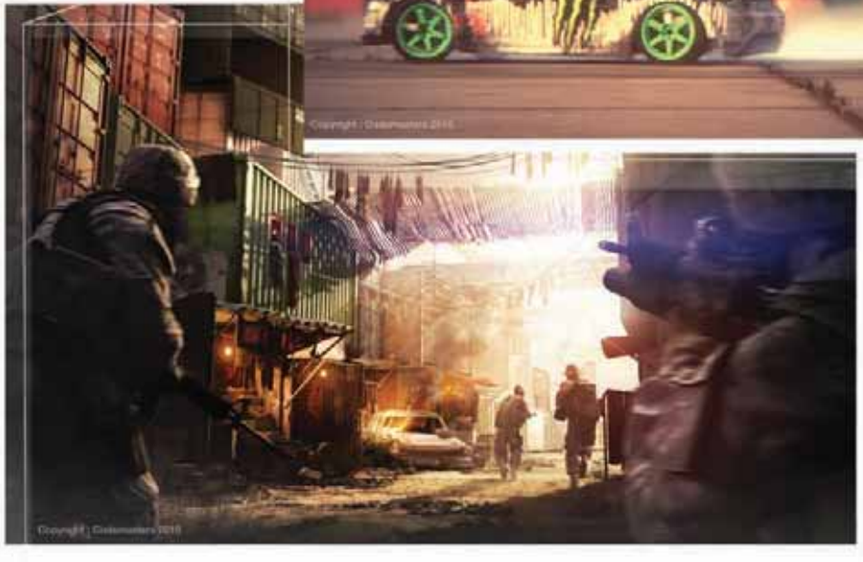

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//COMMENT: LAW

How Hard Must You Try?

by **Tatiana Kruse**, Salans

CONTRACT NEGOTIATION is vitally important in every industry.

A common point of negotiating contracts governed by English law is the level of endeavour to apply to various obligations. Those levels are, from lowest to highest: 'reasonable', 'all reasonable' or 'best'.

The term 'commercially reasonable' has been imported from the US but not been considered in any English case.

Although these terms are common currency, their meaning has not been entirely clear, but has been further clarified in the case of CPC Group Limited v Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company (June 2010).

The case concerned a real estate development, but its findings on endeavours are relevant to contracts generally, so bear with me.

The defendant, owned by the Qatari Investment Authority, entered into a joint venture with the claimant, relating to the development of the Chelsea Barracks site. The defendant then bought out the claimant, with some of the purchase price being deferred until the development had received its planning permission.

CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

The contract obliged the defendant to 'use all reasonable but commercially prudent endeavours to enable the achievement of the various threshold events and Payment Dates'.

In the event, the Prince of Wales disliked the proposal – it was apparently too modern – and so told the defendant, and the Prime Minister and the Emir of Qatar. The Mayor of London – whose office had powers over the approval – disliked it publicly (it was too repetitive) and not a little press comment ensued. The defendant the withdrew its planning application.

The claimant sued the defendant for, among other things, breaching the above obligation. The judge dismissed this part of the claim.

He rejected the claimant's argument that a party obliged to use 'all reasonable endeavours' must, if necessary, subordinate its own financial interests to obtaining the desired result.

This argument was based on Lewison's The Interpretation of Contracts (2007) and Rhodia International Holdings Ltd v Huntsman International LLC [2007], where it was held that 'reasonable endeavours' probably required the obligor to take only one of a number of reasonable courses of action whereas 'best' probably required all courses to be taken, so that 'all reasonable' would equate to 'best'.

The judge, however, cited the Court of Appeal's decision in the case of Yewbelle Limited v London Green Developments [2007], that 'all reasonable endeavours' does not always imply an obligation to sacrifice one's commercial interests.

In the present case, the words 'but commercially prudent' supported the interpretation that the sacrifice was not required, thus allowing the defendant to take into account its own commercial interests.

> ***"A common point of negotiating contracts governed by English law is the level of endeavour to apply to various obligations."***

THE UPSHOT:

Level 1: 'Reasonable' does not of itself impose an obligation to sacrifice one's own commercial interests. Probably, it requires only one of a number of possible reasonable courses of action to be taken. However, if the provision specifies certain required steps, those must be taken.

Level 2: 'All reasonable' imposes an obligation to take all reasonable courses of action. It probably does not oblige the party to sacrifice its commercial interests.

Level 3: 'Best' too imposes an obligation to take all reasonable courses of action. The standard of reasonableness was stated by the Court of Appeal as 'to take all those steps in [the obligor's] power which are capable of producing the desired results […] being steps which a prudent, determined and reasonable [obligee], acting in his own interests and desiring to achieve that result, would take'.

The obligee's perspective is generally relevant. The courses of action might involve expenditure and risk, but only where these is a reasonable prospect of either success or gain. Steps that would lead to 'certain ruin' are not required.

Level 4: Unqualified obligation. But it does depend on the circumstances and the contract as a whole. These levels are often significant in games developer contracts especially as regards achieving milestones and fixing bugs.

Tatiana Kruse, of international law firm Salans LLP, is specialised in IP and IT law and has a particular interest computer games. She can be contacted on +44 (0)20 7509 6134.
tkruse@salans.com

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25 YEARS OF GDC

Game Developers Conference director Meggan Scavio talks about the long and winding road to creating an industry behemoth

GDC DIRECTOR Meggan Scavio is philosophical about the upcoming 25th Game Developers Conference, taking place at the Moscone Center in San Francisco from Febuary 28th to March 4th 2011.

"I've been with the GDC for a very long time," she says.

"Not quite half of its lifetime, but close. There is a binding principle that has existed for as long as I can remember. I truly believe that the fact we still adhere to it is the very reason the event continues to thrive today.

"That principle is that 'content is king.'"

And it is this principle that she believes has driven turnout to the event over the years.

"GDC session content influences the attendance of qualified, experienced developers which in turn fuels the exhibit floor and sponsors. That content needs to be relevant and unbiased. It needs to be valuable to our audience.

"If developers see no value in it, GDC becomes irrelevant. 'content is king' is our not-so-secret secret."

Of course, that does not mean that the event hasn't undergone significant changes over the years.

"I think the first big shift we saw in both the games industry and the GDC was the proliferation of the consoles. The latter half of the 90s saw them take off, and that was reflected in the name of the conference.

"When it launched in 1988 it was called the Computer Game

THE MONTH AHEAD

A look at what January has in store for the industry and beyond…

JANUARY 1ST:
New Year's Day, 2011. Seriously, it's 2011. Where are the flying cars already?

JANUARY 4TH:
A partial solar eclipse will be visable arcoss most of Europe, giving developers across the continent a chance to look up from their christmas games haul. For a second.

JANUARY 6TH:
Day one of the four-day **International Consumer Electronics Show** in Las Vegas, USA. What will be revealed? Ladies and Gentlemen, place your bets.

JANUARY 11TH:
Kingdom Hearts: Re:coded is released on DS. It's as good a chance as any to see Disney characters wielding medieval weaponry.

JANUARY 15TH:
Eden games' **Test Drive Unlimited 2** will come doughnuting onto a console near you.

JANUARY 18TH:
Media Molecule's only-slightly-delayed **LittleBigPlanet 2** will have you dressing sackboy in drag all over again.

JANUARY 20TH:
GameON: Finance, the two-day business forum for the interactive entertainment industry, kicks-off in Toronto.

JANUARY 25TH:
Burns Night Eat haggis, drink whisky and read poetry. The big three!

JANUARY 25TH:
Dead Space 2 scuttles onto consoles around the world, and international cases of insomnia skyrocket.

JANUARY 26TH:
The two-day **Mobile Games Forum** 2011 will be bringing fine mobile gaming folk together in London to discuss the industry's future.

JANUARY 26TH:
Australia Day, time to reinforce outdated Antipodean stereotypes and compare the size of knives.

JANUARY 28TH:
The **Global Game Jam** begins. You'll have 48 hours, people. Make a game.

Developers Conference, but by 1999 it was realised that it was probably more reflective of the industry to re-brand and drop the 'Computer'."

That dramatic branding alteration was a clear statement of intent, but such a large-scale reassesment of the conference has not had to become a frequent occurance. As Scavio points out, this doesn't mean it has been allowed to grow stagnant.

"Since then the changes have been less drastic, we tend to address the trends in our summits. You can see that with the Social and Online Games Summit and with the Smartphone Summit, both the aftermath of combining summits in order to speak to the ever-changing games landscape."

Scavio has a clear love of her job, but when asked is able to outline the harder reposibilities she shoulders.

"Sure there are diffcult parts. For me the worst part is having to explain to people why their submissions aren't accepted. It's never an easy answer and sometimes I don't have solid feedback. The GDC averages 800 submissions and only a fraction can graduate to sessions, which makes it impossible to explain to everyone why they haven't got through. I wish I were more helpful in these instances."

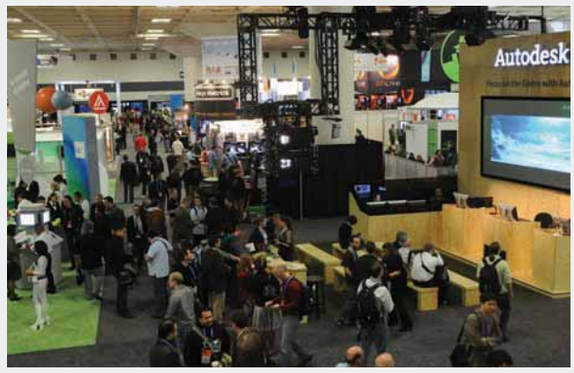
The event itself is what Scavio points to as payoff for her work.

"Not much makes me happier than being onsite and feeling part of such an amazing industry," she says.

"The collective talent housed in the Moscone Center that week is enough to make my head spin. It's my favourite week of the year."

www.gdconf.com

GDC



DEVELOP DIARY

Your complete games development event calendar for the months ahead…

D.I.C.E. SUMMIT
February 9th - 11th
Las Vegas, US
www.dicesummit.org

Design, Innovate, Communicate, Entertain. The Academy of Arts and Sciences' D.I.C.E. Summit is the annual event for video games executives that has been held in Las Vegas, Nevada since 2002.

A new edition to the summit's busy shedule in 2011 is a go-karting tournament, which will feature among a poker contest, golf competition and the 14th Annual Interactive Achievement Awards.

Confirmed speakers for this year include Polyphony Studios president Kazunori Yamauchi, Cerny Games president Mark Cerny and 5th Cell creative director and CEO Jeremiah Slaczk. Ticket registration is open now.

JANUARY 2011

INTERNATIONAL CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW
January 6th to 9th
Las Vegas, US
www.cesweb.org

GAMEON: FINANCE
January 20th to 21st
Toronto, Canada
www.gameonfinance.com

MOBILE GAMES FORUM 2011
January 26th to 27th
London, UK
www.mobilegamesforum.co.uk

GLOBAL GAME JAM
January 28th to 30th
Everywhere
www.globalgamejam.org

WORLD OF LOVE 2
January 28th
London, UK
www.indiegamesarcade.com/world-of-love

FEBRUARY 2011

D.I.C.E. SUMMIT
February 9th to 11th
Las Vegas, US
www.dicesummit.org

CASUAL CONNECT
February 8th to 10th
Hamburg, Germany
europe.casualconnect.org

GDC
February 28th to March 4th
San Francisco, US
www.gdconf.com

MARCH 2011

GAMES FLEADH 2011
March 9th to 10th
Tipperary Institute, Ireland
www.gamesfleadh.ie

APRIL 2011

FESTIVAL OF GAMES 2011
April 28th to 29th
Utrecht, The Netherlands
www.festivalofgames.org

MAY 2011

NORDIC GAME 2011
May 10th to 13th
Malmo, Sweden
www.nordicgame.com

CANADIAN GAMES CONFERENCE
May 19th to 20th
Vancouver, Canada
canadiangamesconference.com

JUNE 2011

E3 EXPO 2011
June 7th to 9th
Los Angeles, US
www.e3expo.com

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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

"Globally, we have to encourage cross-studio collaboration."
Phil Rogers, Square Enix, p40 - 42

The London development scene up close

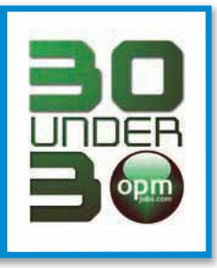
p28 - 34

Tiga surveys UK dev community

p36 - 37

New names to watch in 30 Under 30

p44 - 47



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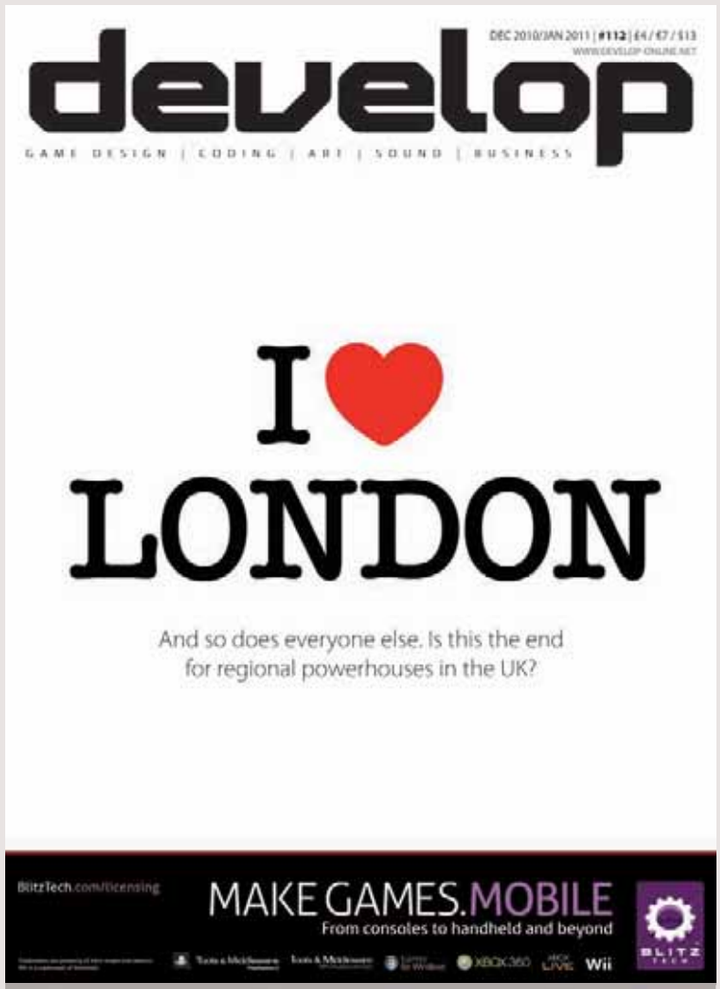
develop
The international monthly for games programmers, artists, musicians and producers
News, views, clues (and booze)...
WAP's up at Nokia?
Brand New!
Nina Kristensen
GROW UP
Small studios will kill us, warns Ian Baverstock...
CODING • DESIGN • ART • SOUND • BUSINESS

2000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From consoles to handheld and beyond
XBOX360
Wii

2010

10 years later

We take a look back at one of the most exciting decades in the history of videogames development as Develop hits its 10th anniversary, p24 - 26

Perfect 10

Develop's first issue…

…and it's most recent

Game design. Coding. Art. Sound. Business. The topics never change, but the industry did, and so did the magazine. **Michael French** looks back through ten years of Develop…

2001

THE MORE things change, the more they stay the same.

Develop's first year embraced the bigger and better nature of game development wholeheartedly.

The very first cover feature was a missive from Ian Baverstock on why studios need to 'Grow Up' else risk going bust quickly. His controversial claims put *Develop* instantly at the heart of the games industry, and the following month we published a range of articles - some biting back, others agreeing.

Later issues looked in depth at both the high-risk nature of games development, the rising prominence of American and French-speaking studios, why the education sector hadn't yet embraced games, and ways to raise VC money.

But our favourite 'how things have changed' moment came in a roundtable about PS2 games development in the first issue of the year. 'Are any of you using middleware?' *Develop* asked, and the likes of Nina Kristensen, Jez San and Brain in a Jar's Matt Gabriel just said they weren't interested. These days, asking that question would get you laughed out of GDC.

Prescient quote of the year: "I think Sony needs to be a little careful of being too arrogant about their position," said Demis Hassabis in a roundtable about PS2 development.

Hindsight's a wonderful thing: "We see ourselves more as a format holder and as a potential distributor than as a publisher," says Nokia. Um…

2002

WITH DEVELOP quickly established, and games development fast growing up, year two for the magazine took the opportunity to sit back a bit and think about the nitty-gritty of games development.

The most memorable pieces that year included a cover story written by Jason Kingsley on why you can make a living of licensed games – and be proud of it, plus a valiant argument for retaining IP rights (a rule still being wrestled with today) from Matt Nagy, and a look at how a then-unknown trio of young developers called Introversion had decided to not even try publishers and printed their discs and packaging themselves.

Although the year's final feature, a look at the game business boom in Dundee, is a little wince-worthy today after a year of pain for the Scots in 2010.

Highlight of the year, however, was a cover feature on the science of jumping in platform games by Ben Cousins, then of Intrepid Games and now head of EA's Play4Free games team in Stockholm. Here's a fun fact: the timing sweet spot between hitting the jump button and the character landing on the ground is between 0.6 and 08 seconds.

Hindsight's a wonderful thing: "We will be actively involved in all the games Rare makes," co-founder Chris Stamper told *Develop*, hours after announcing the studio's sale to Microsoft for a cool $375m – still the UK's biggest value acquisition ever. He was probably just waiting for the cheque to clear.

2003

AFTER THE boom, usually comes the bust. For UK developers it was no different – a wave of studio closures opened 2003. The collapse of 200-man outfit Rage was Exhibit A as the future of games development in the UK went on trial Baverstock's issue #1 warning had come true.

That gives the context around many of *Develop*'s big 2003 stories an extra edge.

Specifically: Ubisoft's plan to grow its studio business overseas by thousands, not hundreds, and a serious examination of trying out 'the Hollywood model' in face of increasingly disparate development.

Most sobering, and simultaneously optimistic, commentary came from EA CEO John Riccitiello: "There are probably more start-ups in the UK than anywhere else in the world. If you start five times more than anyone else, you're probably going to suffer more exits than anyone else."

Prescient quote of the year: *"Steam is exactly the sort of thing the industry should be building as part of next-generation entertainment. The issue for developers isn't how to texture a polygon anymore; it's how to get that polygon onto someone's desk they can be entertained?"* Gabe Newell spoke to *Develop* as his studio Valve prepared its digital distribution platform for launch.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: *"Some nights I lie awake thinking it will never work,"* but Newell added he wasn't always confident.

2004

THE YEAR'S run of *Develop* opens with a cover featuring a solitary, lone question mark – no better way to represent both the post-2003 uncertainty and the results of *Develop*'s first industry survey.

But the industry cheered up fast this year – and soon key were the potential of 3D mobile gaming, the rise of the superstar developer, and a slowly emerging beacon of strong UK talent, both publisher-funded and independent. Sega announced its plan to spend big on EU studios, while the last issue of the year featured a little, quirky game called *LEGO Star Wars*.

Oh, and remember that clumsy 'Who uses middleware?' question from the very first issue? Well clearly someone was – this was the year EA shelled out £40m for UK studio Criterion Games and its RenderWare games technology business.

Prescient quote of the year: *"The future of the small developer is not over, but they need re-educating,"* said Jeremy Heath-Smith as he split from Eidos and Core to found Circle Studio. He wasn't wrong – although the less said about Circle's disastrous debut and eventual closure, the better.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: *"We are 100 per cent committed to continuing the work we've been doing over the past 10 years,"* Criterion's David Lau-Kee may have been committed to the RenderWare business, but new owner EA was less so – it was off the market within 12 months.

2005

DEVELOP ITSELF grew up a little this year, with a run of glossy cover stories looking at all kinds of celebrity faces, from top tier developers like Michel Ancel through to high end facial animation graphics tested using Marilyn Monroe's mug. Plus David Braben, Tim Christian… and, er, Marc Ecko (the ambitious fashion designer whose gaming project ended up pretty crummy, remember?).

The decade's mid-point was a moment of clarity for many developers, many of those talking in the pages of *Develop* spoke about focusing more and more on their players' needs not those of their game or their team.

It was best put by Ancel: "From the moment you want to develop for thousands or millions of people, you are obliged to think of them and not only of you."

Plus, there was an overall enthusiasm about what lay ahead for the games industry – to be expected given this was the watershed year for new consoles. Microsoft was silently courting developers to start thinking about 360, the Nintendo DS was bedding in, and Sony was finally trying to draw together expectations for the PS3 in spite of a smoke-and-mirrors unveiling at E3.

Prescient quote of the year: *"The less reported truth is that Microsoft has got so much more right with the Xbox version 2.0."* That one was insight from us, actually – but it was true: few talked about the lengths Microsoft went on the 360 to go beyond Xbox. And few predicted that it would all ultimately play to its advantage.

2006

LOOKING BACK, 'New Directions' was the theme for *Develop*, and games developers, in 2006.

Every single one of our big stories focused on a new approach to games. Richard Garriott wrote an extensive essay on the joys of returning to independent development with NCsoft; a Tiga report looked at the globalisation of the game making craft; LucasArts laid out its plan to merge games and film; Microsoft and Sony revealed how they were recruiting non-games talents both professional and amateur; meanwhile EA, Charles Cecil and Climax all discussed at length their new ways to champion and make original games by tweaking the way they commission and nurture unnourished ideas. Sure, not every one of those plans bore fruit – but a good portion of them did. Even the dirty word of 'outsourcing' was finding credibility. Funny what opportunities a more stable console business provides.

Prescient quote of the year: *"Publishers never sorted out how to handle revenue from second-hand or rental games. But now advertising and e-distribution means you don't need publishers."* Wise words from Blitz following the success of its Burger King-funded games.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: *"One of the classic mistakes – which we're already seeing on some next-gen projects – is the crazy wishful thinking."* So said LucasArts' then games boss Peter Hirschmann. Er, remind us – what happened to that ambitious *Indiana Jones* game?

2007

IT WOULDN'T be until the following year that the Apple touchscreen devices were opened for apps, but its arrival in the summer of '07 was emblematic of big changes ahead. This was the year games were stretched outwards – by consumers, new hardware companies, and a number of established firms.

Our bigger stories spoke a lot to that: Media Molecule's debut unveiling of *LittleBigPlanet*, Ubisoft's plan to add even more to its Canadian fortress, Microsoft Game Studios formally setting up a UK base, Disney detailing its UK game plan, Bungie jumping ship from Microsoft to become independent, again.

And, buried as a newswire, the formation of a small San Francisco games company with the weird name Zynga.

Plus, perhaps the biggest surprise of all – Nintendo introduced WiiWare. The download service has lots of unfulfilled potential, but seeing Nintendo of all companies embrace digital distribution really did prove how the migration to online content was well in progress.

Prescient quote of the year: *"Nintendo has functioned as the unofficial E&D team for the whole industry in the last few years,"* said journalist Stuart Dredge at the second Develop conference.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: *"I think Nokia is doing amazing things with N-Gage."* We're going to share the blushes of the person that said this, but people were actually thinking it.

2008

YES, this was a disastrous year for banks and financial institutions – but it would take a while for the wave of economic cut backs to slash through games.

Which might explain while many of the covers in this issue feature developers in good spirits – Brighton teams, the Rockstar North boys, the group of Japanese boys and girls recruited by Microsoft to build a *SingStar* killer. We even managed to secure and incredibly rare interview with publicity-shy Rockstar Games founder Sam Houser.

It was the June 2008 issue, however, that pointed to where the industry was headed next – namely into a clash with the Government. Tiga and ELSPA members united to fund the Games Up campaign, which aimed to raise the profile of problems undermining the industry. Namely: tax breaks and education. The whole campaign, of course, prefigured the resulting two years of disappointment and frustration as the outgoing leadership flip-flopped over games subsidies.

Prescient quote of the year: *"A great British industry could become a dead man walking, just like the British film industry before Government gave it a tax credit. We must act now if the UK games industry is to remain a global leader."* New Tiga CEO Richard Wilson had only been in the job a few weeks – but he wasn't prepared to pull any punches when it came to the challenges for UK developers that lay ahead.

2009

PUTTING A brave face on things in the wake of a global recession which hit everyone hard – including publishers' acquisition budgets – *Develop* started the year with a cover featuring a beaming Barack Obama.

Only two pages later, our Job-O-Meter revealed that over 2,000 games development jobs had been lost globally as publishers cut back. It was just a slice of the bigger cull going on in the wider tech world – Sony was going to lay off 16,000 non-games staff, 5,000 jobs were to go at Microsoft, Intel was cutting 6,000 and Nokia wanted to ditch 1,000.

But this presented a huge opportunity for those looking to do it on their own – and the resultant watershed moment last year of apps, games and digitally delivered content from new small teams was no doubt catalysed by the massive changes underway among the workforces at big tech businesses.

Later in the year, *Develop* profiled initiatives by contrasting giants Channel 4 and Sony to harness the fast-growing indie and microstudio environment with new content plans and new ways to deliver small-form 'mini' titles to PSP.

Prescient quote of the year: *"I'm backing robotics. I just can't envision a future in which we don't have little robotic guts running around and doing stuff for us."* Okay, so Will Wright's vision of the future – shared in a piece for Develop were he interviewed fellow dev luminary Nolan Bushnell – hasn't come to pass and isn't 'prescient' just yet, but let's give it time, eh?

2010

WITH THE app revolution well and truly established, two *Develop* covers this year looked at how Apple's formats will go further. First through the iPad, and then using Epic's Unreal Engine on mobile as the examples.

This year the changing nature of games technology was more relevant than ever. Developers can spread their bets wider than ever. Mobile? Social networks? Console?

And in an ironic twist again linking back to that question posed in our very first roundtable, this year we published an entire issue dedicated to middleware. The 15 page special was one of the most popular features we've run in some time.

But it wasn't the most controversial – that goes to the November issue, just a month old. 'Will the last developer to leave Britain please turn out the lights' we said of the growth in Canadian games development. Readers accused us of being bribed, stupid and unpatriotic. The rest took it as a warning – and the resultant show of force championing London games developers is proof that, even after ten years, *Develop* can still cut through to an issue burning at the heart of games development.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: "We went to Activision and said 'we don't think the game's up to our quality level'. It was totally shippable, it was OK. But we would've liked to have had more time. They said 'OK' which was great. They were great. Really, really good." We wonder if Bizarre Creations still feels the same way about its parent now that it is trying to sell the studio off?

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Capital Gains

London is inevitably home to numerous game studios, service providers and tech companies, but its developer community is growing at a real pace. What does the city offer those who set up shop there? **Will Freeman** speaks to the gaming luminaries based in The Big Smoke…

Above: The London Eye and Sea Life London Aquarium

Despite its reputation for dreary weather, London is a vibrant and colourful city. Its creative core in Soho is culturally energetic and hip, and plays host to global leaders not only in game development, but also across advertising, film, art and fashion.

Throughout the UK capital, its boroughs are bristling with good ideas, and pumping out great games in every space from triple-A to social. *Moshi Monters*, *SingStar*, *Bow Street Runner*, *Pet Society*, *Football Manager*; these are the games that are born of the London development scene.

And yet games studios were curiously absent from Prime Minister David Cameron's vision for the city as a new global hub for the technology sector's elite (*see 'Zone of the Eastenders', opposite*). Everyone seems to agree that, figuratively speaking, London is on fire, but is it ablaze with innovation or set to crumble to ashes?

CITY SLICKERS

There's certainly a wealth of positivity from the studio heads who see London as a breeding ground for exciting new projects.

Escape Studios' CG specialist Simon Fenton

"It's where the culture and the talent is, and that's what we care about," says Margaret Robertson, former Edge editor and development director of Hide&Seek, which not only makes games for console, smartphone and browser, but also for playground and tabletop. "It's the place with the critical mass of people who understand the crossover of gaming and culture. We don't think there's anywhere else in the world we could be doing quite what we're doing here."

Paulina Bozek, former *SingStar* visionary and now CEO and director at social start-up Inensu, agrees with Robertson's image of the capital as a melting pot of creativity: "London is a vibrant city and the buzz of the media, entertainment, fashion, art, business and everything else here is inspiring. The concentration of companies also leads on to a lot of very interesting collaborations and partnerships being formed."

> ***"London is a vibrant city and the buzz of media, entertainment and business is inspiring. The concentration of companies leads to interesting partnerships."***
>
> Paulina Bozek, Inensu

London provides a continually large, rich and accessible stream of creative and technical talent working across a wide range of the creative industries from which to recruit and partner; something many companies, such as mobile specialist Ideaworks, have managed to harness to great effect.

"Many leading educational centres are also based in and around London and obviously many people are attracted to the city for lifestyle reasons, particularly when coming from overseas," explains the outfit's head of studio Rob Hendry.

London's game educators, too, are poised to benefit from the size and draw that has seen the metropolis become one of the most crowded spaces on the planet. Escape Studios is a CG training school and 3D graphics vendor that has seen the city provide a wealth of students and tutors.

"It's also where most of our industry contacts are based – because we commit to providing careers support for every one of our classroom graduates, being physically close to recruiters makes a big difference," confirms Simon Fenton, CG Specialist at Escape Studios.

Many also cite the city itself, from its galleries and architecture to its culture and populace, as a source of constant inspiration and motivation.

STREETS OF GOLD?

All well and good, but what of London's famous downside? It remains to this day one of the most expensive places on earth to live, work and relax.

"The costs associated with being in London is a downside in a highly competitive global market," admits Ideawork's Hendry. "We compete with studios in significantly lower cost centres who can in many cases access local and government incentives. We do end up paying a lot of attention to our cost base and business management as a core component of our studio, so that we continue to remain competitive."

"It's definitely not cheap, to live or to run a business," agrees Robin Deitch, managing director at digital character creation specialist

Hide&Seek's games come in virtual and real-world formats

Zone of the Eastenders

With the 2012 Olympic venue currently being constructed in East London, the UK Government is hugely dedicated to the area.

Early in November, that investment of effort was expanded to cover the tech world, as Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to rejuvenate the East End into a technology industry hub that would rival California's renowned Silicon Valley.

"We're not just going to back the big businesses of today, we're going to back the big businesses of tomorrow," claimed the Conservative Party leader. "We are firmly on the side of the high-growth, highly innovative companies of the future. Don't doubt our ambition."

An impressive list of companies including Google, Facebook, Intel, Cisco and British Telecom have reportedly agreed to invest in the area, but the games industry has, as of yet, not been revealed as a sector destined to thrive in the new 'Tech City', in spite of the fact that companies new and old like Inensu and Slide are already based in the East End, and successful outfits like Mind Candy plan to move to the district shortly.

Launching the initiative the day after the PM claimed the UK's proposed game development tax-breaks were scrapped to bring about lower rates of corporation tax did little to inspire studios, and so far the reaction by the games industry to Cameron's vision of bringing a taste of the Californian technology industry to the UK has largely been one of understandable dissapointment.

However, London's studios say they can thrive without Cameron's help. Speaking of the UK capital and its appeal to game developers, Mind Candy CEO Michael Acton Smith says: "It's home to a lot of amazingly talented developers and people that love working in start-ups. There's less competition for superstar employees that work in the game space in London than there is in Silicon Valley."

Prime Minister David Cameron visiting an East End development

Slide London, who like Hendry has a refreshingly buoyant attitude to the challenge of meeting cost. "Of course, global clients don't care for excuses like this when comparing rival bids – so actually you're driven to find efficiencies in the way you do things, which is often for the better."

OPPOURTUNITY KNOCKS

It would be foolish to ignore the expense of keeping a development studio on track in London, but even in such frugal times an optimistic attitude isn't exclusive to Slide and Ideaworks. Confidence in the city's market may be tinged with caution, but there's certainly a sense among the studios in the city that good times lie ahead.

"It's tough times for everyone at the moment with a lot of shifts in the market," confirms Hendry. "On the one side there's consolidation around traditional formats, and on the other there's new and emerging platforms and ways of thinking about gaming. This is particularly relevant to Ideaworks as a studio, but where there are constraints or barriers there's always opportunity, whether you're smart or just in the right place at the right time."

And it would seem London is the right place for seizing those opportunities, particularly in the realms of social, casual and digital download. While there are a number of large-scale operations like SCE London doing perfectly well in the triple-A space, it is the fiercely creative innovators in the relatively new realms that are fast defining London's reputation as the UK's primary development hub. Outfits large and small such as Mind Candy, Playfish, Channel 4 , Hide&Seek and Mediatonic are demonstrating that London is proving UK developers are reacting to a paradigm change in the international industry.

"The games industry is going through a shift where it is hard to sustain large expensive teams," states Bozek, saying of the London development hub: "But there is a very thriving scene of smaller developers and start-ups."

Michael Acton Smith, CEO at *Moshi Monsters* powerhouse Mind Candy is in absolutely in agreement when asked about the state of game development in London: "Online is absolutely thriving but traditional console games seem to be going through challenging times."

> ***"I think where the London scene, and the UK development community as a whole, is thriving is with self-publishing and digital distribution."***
>
> Paul Croft, Mediatonic

There's also a prevailing sense that the potential for success in new areas is something not only London, but the country's wider games industry, can benefit from, with the UK capital spearheading an evolution that sees the nation's development sector rejuvenate and refresh itself.

"I think where the London scene, and the whole UK development community, is actually thriving is with the new wave of self-publishing and digital distribution, where the market and platforms are opening up in such a way that it's possible for many smaller studios to enjoy success," offers Paul Croft, director of games at digital specialist Mediatonic.

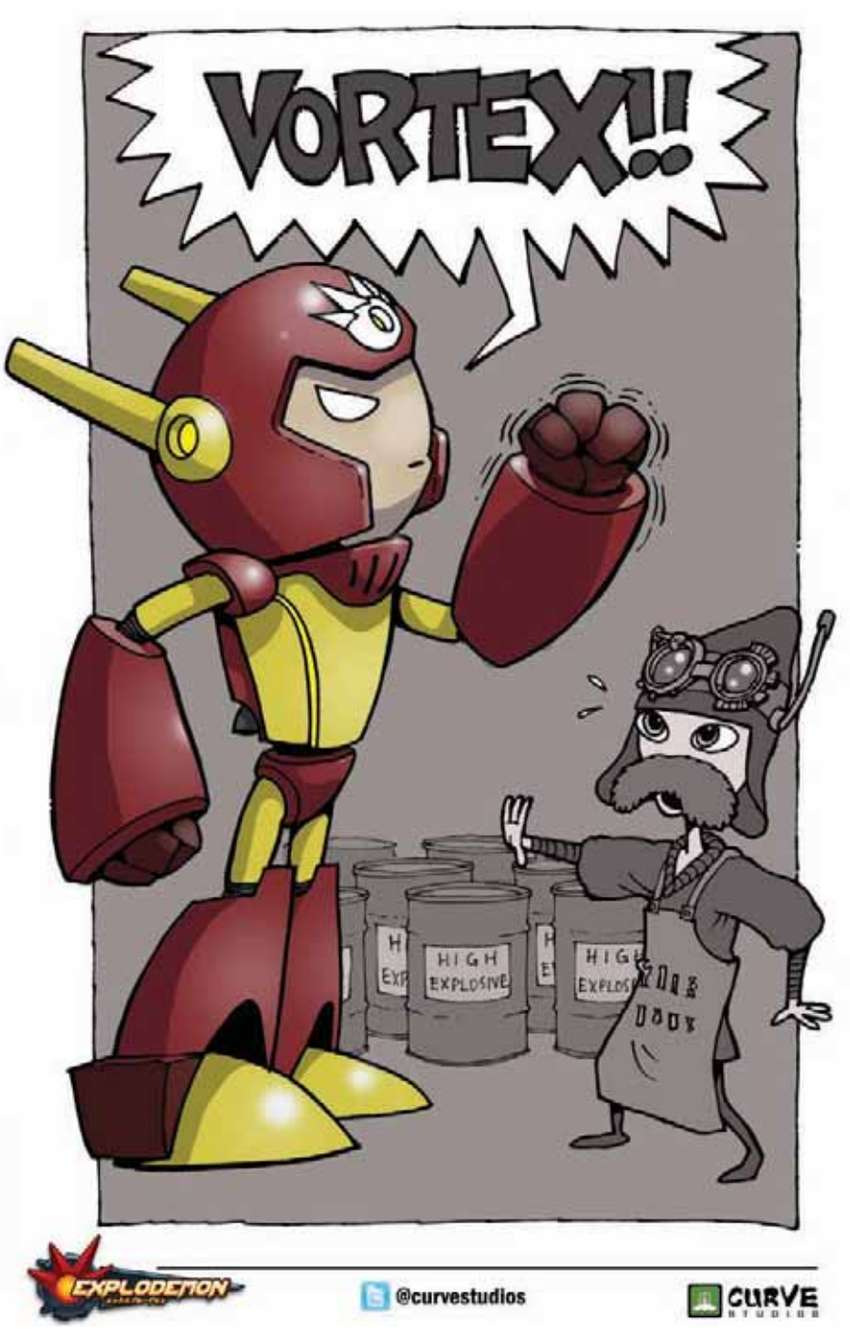
"The UK is certainly going through a rough time in terms of game development," agrees Ed Fear, production associate at *Explodemon* creator Curve Studios. Yet, there's also a quality distinct to London that positions the city as a potential champion of the UK scene, says Fear: "I think people are being agile and reactive by moving into spaces like social and casual games, and digital download titles. From that perspective, London is the perfect place to do that, due to the creative mix and proximity to the media and advertising industries. It's only going to get stronger from here on out."

LEADER OF THE PACK

Quite simply, London is more than a hub for games development. It is now a national and global leader for numerous creative industries including games. It is the perfect place to set up shop as the realms of advertising, education, broadcasting, music and video games converge and intersect, and tech outfits like Unity move to support a potential revolution in set-top box and web TV's (*see pg58*).

Game studios aren't alone in having to adapt in tough times, and the aforementioned

Below: Mediatonic director of games Paul Croft



Below: Ideaworks boss Rob Hendry

sectors are all enduring their own test of resilience, but, as confirmed by NESTA's 'Creative Clusters' report published in late November this year (*full details on pg36-37*), London dominates across the creative industries.

That considered, the UK games sector's current challenges may just be a symptom of this period of change, with London at the forefront of the charge.

Certainly, those in parallel industries based in London are recognising both the challenge ahead, and the potential of a shared future with gaming. It may be that collaboration can strengthen London's position as a vanguard of the British dev scene.

"Channel 4 has a public service remit to reach 16-to-34-year-olds as a core – and for us, 10-to-19-year-olds – with service broadcasting; but we're in a world where teens, tweens, and the 16-to-34-year-old group are consuming more and more internet content alongside or beyond their TV consumption," explains outgoing Channel 4 Education commissioning editor Alice Taylor, who has seen opportunities emerge as audiences new an old have adapted and evolved their tastes.

> ***"The quality of London's collective output is world class. Like it or not, it will continue to be the creative powerhouse of Europe for the foreseeable future."***
>
> Allen Leitch, Spov

"It's been a quarter of a decade since Channel 4 was first set up, and if it wants to be more relevant to an internet-native generation it needs to do more than just broadcast television."

It is that kind of attitude that may empower game developers who listen. Certainly, working with Channel 4 has been fruitful for many London indies, including Beatnik and Zombie Cow, and looking to collaborate with company's from London's wider creative industries is something every studio in the capital should consider, even if it means going head-to-head with the numerous rivals that such a crowded

Paulina Bozek, now CEO of Inensu

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Channel 4 Education commissioning editor Alice Taylor

Michael Acton Smith, CEO at Moshi Monsters studio Mind Candy

Education and production services firm Escape Studios

Below: Social gaming phenomenon Moshi Monsters

metropolis inevitably fosters. In fact, it may well be that London's infamously competitive pace is in itself something that offers opportunity and motivation to work in conjunction with other companies.

"The competitive nature of the city is great for us – only the best thrive, which keeps us honest and gives us a big roster of top-class collaborators," adds Robertson, who is also upbeat about running a studio in London: "The scope and scale of opportunity for good games makers is growing faster than the economy has been contracting. We've been able to grow very fast at a time when headlines have been dire, and have strong confidence that we'll be able to sustain it."

> ***"The competitive nature of the city is great. The scope of opportunity for games makers is growing faster than the economy is contracting."***
>
> Margaret Robertson, Hide&Seek

There are other industries with a stronghold in London that are also of benefit to London games companies through more traditional collaboration. Slide London's experience with the numerous media companies born from the city's prolific TV and film industry makes for a case in point, as explained by managing director Deitch: "Slide benefits directly from the related CG industries based in London. We have a great dialogue with the many tools and tech companies such as Autodesk and the Foundry, and have easy access to the wealth of knowledge and experience from the post and VFX companies in Soho."

Other service providers have benefitted from similar partnerships, such as cinematics studio Spov, which is based in the East End not far from Slide and Inensu. "I think that Spov's contribution to the *Call of Duty* franchise, and *Black Ops* in particular, proves that although there may only be a few fully fledged games developers and their respective service providers within the London area, the quality of our collective output is undeniably world class," suggests Spov managing director Allen Leitch. "Like it or not, London will continue to be the

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Triple-A in London

There's little doubt that small studios in the games industry's new frontiers are making a name for London as a development hub, but that's not to say that the traditional triple-A space in the city is down and out.

In fact, quite the opposite is true; a fact Robin Deitch, managing director at Slide London, knows more than anybody. Based in East London Slide was established in 2007, and is one of the UK's leading digital character creation studios. The team at Slide have been commissioned by numerous developers and publishers, building up an impressive portfolio of work with company's based within London and far further afield.

"In the early 2000s London was stuffed with ambitious and expanding games devs; a few years later the majority of these had evaporated," explains Deitch. "To a great degree though, these things are cyclical: right now the city boasts a selection of fantastic larger studios and an indie scene in rude health; both set against the backdrop of large media companies like Channel 4 buying into games in a big way, and the ever-impending collision between the digital agencies and traditional games studios."

"While it's easy to get the impression that London is now all about social, casual and indie, between RockStar, Rocksteady, SCE, Splash Damage and Headstrong – to name but a few – there are some serious triple-A titles in production."

Robin Deitch, Slide London managing director

Hide&Seek development director Margaret Robertson

creative powerhouse of Europe for the foreseeable future."

REGION FREE

But some say it would be rather unwise to overemphasise London's position as a potential champion of the UK's game development sector. Ideaworks Hendry highlights: "Historically there has always been a very strong studio presence and capability across the UK, particularly in the North West, Midlands and North East, and that should certainly continue.

"No doubt some studios are having a hard time but that's as true in London as elsewhere. Putting London up as a beacon is not the right approach," he adds. "It's better to focus on a UK-wide approach and look to a London based Government to provide appropriate incentives and initiatives to allow our industry to compete and express its talents on a global stage."

Hendry's isn't alone in his perspective either. "I don't think England has a bastion of the games industry unlike, perhaps, Canada for example, whose bastion would be in Montréal," proposes Escape Studio's Fenton.

"The big issues are less about regionalism and more about the relationship with industry and education, outsourcing and the lack of junior opportunities.

> ***"The issues are less about regionalism and more about the relationship with industry and education, outsourcing and the lack of junior opportunities."***
>
> Rob Hendry, Ideaworks

"This, coupled with the constant cycle of layoffs, is a problem the industry needs to tackle together collectively. Outsourcing and not investing in training is leaving us with a skills and vacancy shortage which could be detrimental to the industry."

Yet despite the fact that opinions on London's role as the pinnacle in the UK games industry are still somewhat divided, the general consensus is that the city's development sector is indeed thriving during one of the industry's toughest ongoing periods of transformation.

London's overheads are high, its competition is extremely fierce and the city is as packed with challenges as it is with residents, but studios with both triple-A and independent output are making a success for themselves, weathering the wider storm in the UK's rainy capital.

A base in London primes any studio with immeasurably vast opportunities for collaboration, and puts it in the heartland of most of the contemporary creative sectors. Clouds may drape themselves across the city on a few too many days for most visitors' tastes, but the outlook is bright for those developers ready to take a realistic view of today's changing industry.

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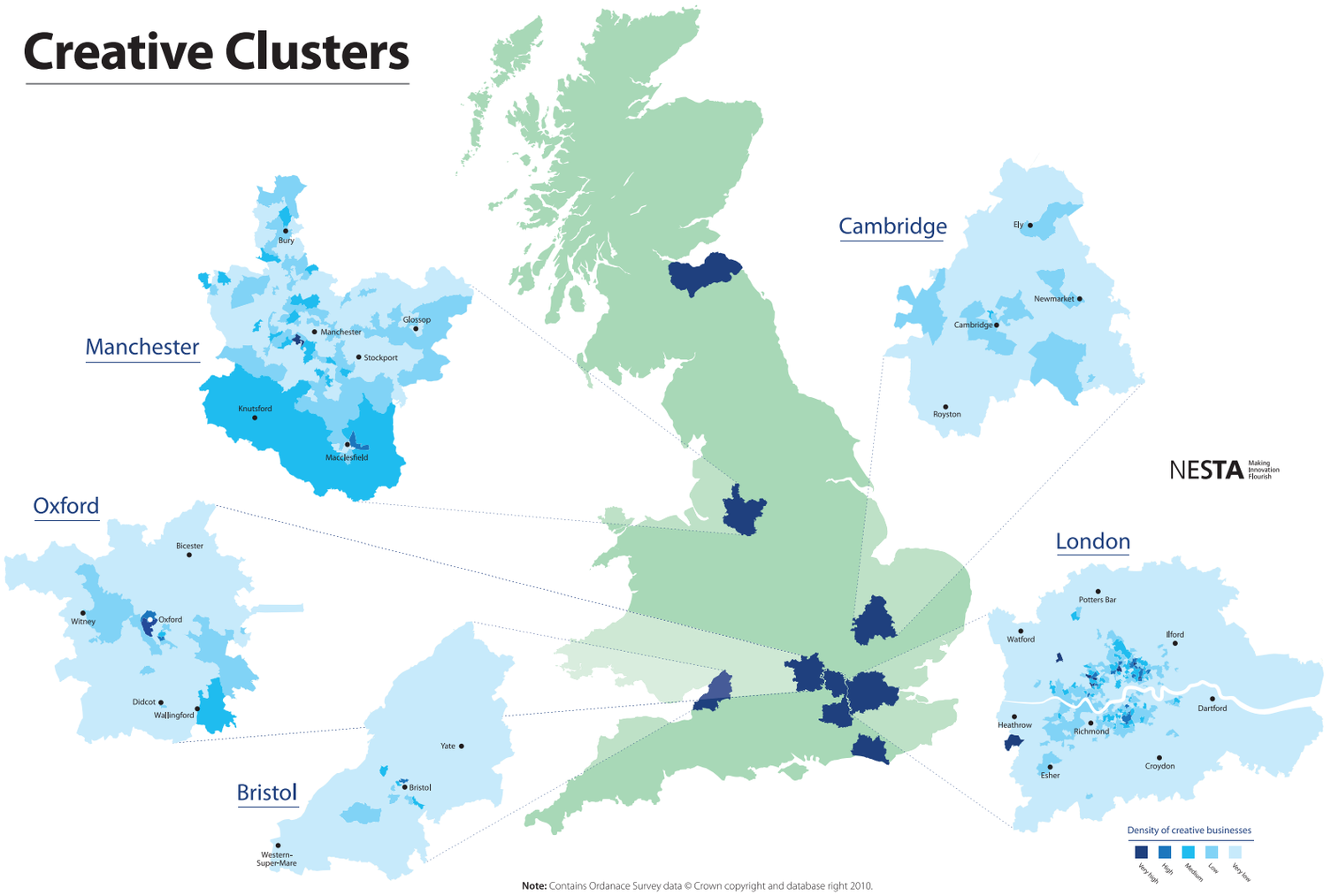
The lay of the land

Two key reports, one from Tiga and one from NESTA, last month laid bare the changing regional balance for creative businesses in the UK…

Creative Clusters



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NESTA'S NEW RESEARCH suggests that the British creative industries have grown at an average rate of 5.2 per cent each year – nearly twice the pace of the UK economy in general.

The data has brought NESTA to the conclusion that, over the coming five years, Britain's creative industries will continue to grow "at double the rate of the rest of the economy".

NESTA's findings come as part of its new 'Creative Clusters and Innovation' report – an ambitious study which has resulted in the first ever map of British creativity.

The so-called 'Creativity Map' identifies the UK's key creative hotspots, and finds that London is the dominant creative industry city of Britain.

A statement released by NESTA did not specify how many of the mapped London creative firms were in the games business.

The paper identifies nine other creative hotspots across the UK; Bath, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Guildford, Edinburgh, Manchester, Oxford and Wycombe and Slough.

"Britain is a world-beater in the creative industries and this mapping shows the centres of excellence we have across the country," said NESTA research head Stian Westlake.

"With the right policy interventions, such as the East London Tech City initiative, these creative clusters have the potential to become global hubs for high growth, innovative creative industries and create wider economic growth."

Tiga's UK Games Industry Survey

The key results

■ Between July 2008 and July 2009 the headcount at British video games studios fell by four per cent. Between July 2009 and September 2010, **the UK's studio headcount fell by another five per cent** to 9,010, a nine per cent fall since 2008. Meanwhile, the global games industry's software sales grew by 16 per cent between 2008 and 2010.

■ At the time of the census (October 2010), there were **9,010 people employed in games development in the UK**, including developers, publishers, publisher studios, service companies and broadcasters with games divisions (figure excludes HR, admin, sales, marketing and commercial staff). This figure is down from 9,900 in 2008 and 9,500 in 2009.

■ At the time of the census there were **278 games companies in the UK** (including developers, publishers, publisher studios and service companies). This figure rose from 264 in 2008.

■ **This decline in headcount is severe** and reflects a number of studio failures, but, more importantly, the closure or severe downsizing of a number of studios either owned by global companies or reliant upon global companies for business. Over the same period, 131 video games companies (including 78 studios and 32 service companies) closed, went out of business or left the industry altogether, the vast majority (84 per cent) being games development companies.

■ Although jobs have been lost and companies closed across the global development industry, **the UK has been hit particularly hard** compared to territories benefiting from tax breaks for games production, which have continued to grow strongly. Strikingly, while the UK development workforce has declined over the last two years, Canada's development headcount has grown by at least 33 per cent over the same period.

■ Nevertheless, the industry has recorded net growth in the number of games companies with 145 start-ups or market entrants. Over 80 per cent of these new companies are delivering network games as opposed to retail product, making them better placed to benefit from newer, and potentially more sustainable business models.

■ **Overseas government support for video games** development has continued to grow further and **destabilised the uneven international playing field**. Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Texas and Florida have joined Canada, Germany, Japan and South Korea and increased their fiscal support for video games development.

■ **A brain drain to subsidised studios** overseas is depleting British studios of skilled and experienced staff. A Tiga survey in 2009 found that **23 per cent of UK game development studios had lost staff to foreign countries** in the preceding 12 months and of these 72 per cent indicated that their staff went to Canada.

■ Poor financial conditions globally have resulted in **private funding for video games companies worldwide falling by over 22 per cent** in 2009 compared to 2008. The UK fared considerably worse with funding down 92 per cent in 2009 versus 2008, although indications are that 2010 funding levels are gradually returning to 2008 levels.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH:
Tiga commissioned Games Investor Consulting (GIC), an independent research company, to update its July 2008 census of all known British games companies (including developers, publishers, publisher studios, service companies and broadcasters with games divisions) by telephone. In September 2010 GIC asked almost all extant studios for their development headcounts (excluding HR, admin, sales, marketing and commercial staff) and growth expectations. The findings that follow are drawn from this census, alongside additional publically available data on the UK and global industry.

Behind the numbers

AT TIGA our aim is to make the UK the best place in the world to conduct games business.

We want to attract investment into the UK, increase employment, encourage innovation and promote new start up businesses in the games industry.

In order to make the UK the most attractive gaming territory in the world we need reliable and valid data so we can inform Government, investors and the wider industry about our sector.

Tiga therefore commissions and produces regular information about the state of the UK games industry.

Our most recent research looks at the UK eco-system as a whole to identify positive new developments and assess the long-term future of the sector.

The research also shows the impact of external events such as the global downturn, hardware cycles and overseas government investment in other territories.

Our research highlights two significant conclusions.

Firstly, the UK continues to suffer from a lack of Government interest and support.

Secondly, the eco-system of the UK industry is changing. Over the last two years 145 new companies entered the market, 80 per cent of which focus on networking gaming.

This illustrates the highly competitive and entrepreneurial spirit of the UK games sector, as well as its agility and ability to adapt to challenging new market conditions.

Tiga is focused on supporting these new companies and pressuring Government to create the right environment for them to thrive.

The UK games development sector has changed dramatically over the last two years. Not only has there been significant churn in studio numbers (131 businesses closing, 145 start-ups), but there has also been a dramatic shift towards digital distribution.

At Tiga we believe there is an urgent need to continue the pace of innovation in online gaming, disseminate best practice information and advice to new start-ups and to developers moving towards self-publishing.

However Government must also play its part with the introduction at a national level of measures that will power the industry forward, such as games tax relief.

"There is an urgent need to disseminate best practice and advice to move developers towards self-publishing."

Dr Richard Wilson, Tiga

Tiga is now advancing a clear strategy to support the industry in the light of this new data.

At the political level we are campaigning for measures that will enable game developers to prosper: games tax relief, enhanced R&D tax credits, measures to improve access to finance, a flexible migration policy and action on skills and training. We are raising the profile of the industry and stressing the positive aspects of video games in the wider media

Above all, we are directly helping our members to prosper and grow: creating commercial collaborations; providing free expert advice on business issues; advice on self-publishing and working with Jagex on Project Ignite to enable developers to publish their games; support to attend overseas trade shows; discounts on events and discounts from key industry service providers.

In this way Tiga can help to ensure that the games development sector remains one of the success stories of the UK economy.

Dr Richard Wilson, CEO, Tiga

5ALIVE

HTML5 is the next standard for web development – and it might just be the next coding standard for a huge chunk of games, too. **Michael French** heads to the Netherlands to find out more…

It's an early October morning at Spil Games HQ in Hilversum, Netherlands. Although it's a Saturday, and the weather is surprisingly bright and welcoming outside, the casual games developer/publisher's new offices are bustling with around 40 coders hard at work on new game ideas.

Crunch time? Perhaps the final push before a new launch?

Nope, these people are here out of choice – and they don't even work for Spil. They are young coders on site to attend the Google Game Jam, sponsored by the eponymous web giant.

For the uninitiated, Game Jams bring together developers both professional and amateur to develop game ideas during intense sessions – usually 48 hours – with few stopping to sleep. The IGDA has run its 'Global Game Jam' for a few years years, encouraging universities and studios around the world to hold two-day sessions of sprint-paced coding that champions original, quirky, off-beat ideas that wouldn't normally see the light of day.

Spil's Game Jam is specifically focused on HTML5, the upcoming new standard for web development that brings audio, video and a deeper coding environment closer to browsers. Essentially, it allows for the creation of rich apps including games that run in the browser – Google is banking on this being a success for its Chrome App Store.

HTML5 upgrades many of the things people take for granted about the web. While concepts like multiplayer, digital distribution, cloud storage, apps, even easily-mocked phrases like 'gamification' and 'transmedia' are all now ingrained in games deeply – the idea of high-end titles being made quickly and run in a browser is still in the grip of plug-ins and third-party software.

As an open standard, HTML5 changes all of that.

> ***"I see parallels with the Flash movement of years back. The ability to go to a website, click play and give something a go is not to be underestimated."***
>
> Peter Driessen, Spil Games

There is something else too, which explains why a Game Jam focusing on a specific platform makes sense – and why HTML5 is that platform. It's clear that the new web environment speaks to the new breed of indie developers rising to prominence in the games industry.

For 'developers', the skill set is rapidly evolving. It always was, of course – but back when Steve Ballmer famously sputtered 'developers, developers, developers' we all know he was talking enterprise developers, nerdy older brother of the cool web developer, and estranged cousin of core games developers. But times are changing, and the skill set and knowledge required from developers has evolved greatly. Tomorrow's generation of stars acknowledge that it's no longer enough to consider yourself just a 'graphics programmer' or 'web developer' – everyone's a developer.

"I don't define myself as a games developer – I'm studying computer sciences, but I play on Xbox, I play on Facebook, I use Foursquare," says one of the young developers at the Game Jam.

"I bet there's something to say about what the developers of those have in common rather than what makes them different. It's hard to know just yet if I'll try game development as an actual career, as I know there's better money in other fields. But making games, and tinkering with that stuff will always be a passion. It's all part of one big mass of coding knowledge in my head."

It seems to be a mindset shared by the Google reps on hand – they don't say 'coding' or 'developing', they call the Jam's activity 'hacking'. It's not just a semantic difference – it's a different mindset.

"I don't know if the game I make here will be any good – but I'll learn from the experiments," says another of the attendant developers.

Of course it helps that the Dutch have a history in hacking and game demos – a spirit and energy and lives on today, and one which HTML5's current scrappy-but-compelling form speaks a lot to.

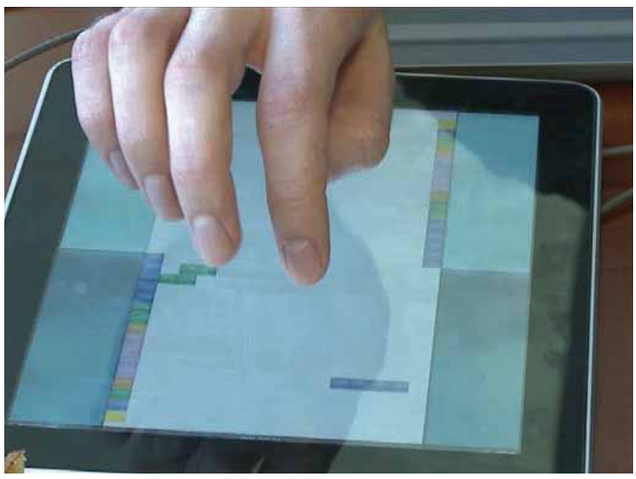
It's still early days for HTML5, but an exciting time. It allows for a much richer web experience, and the potential is huge.

Over the next two pages, we talk to two firms, one from inside games and one from outside it, leading the push towards HTML5's bright future.

Below: Spil's Game Jam event focused specifically on the HTML5 platform

JAM GURUS

Spil Games' CEO Peter Driessen and Robbert van Os explain what's so exciting about HTML5…



Above: Peter Driessen (top), and Robbert van Os of Spil Games

Why host the game jam?
Peter Driessen: We are big supporters of the HTML5 movement – we were one of the first to run games in HTML5, via our new mobile site. The Game Jam is about being supportive and meeting new developers, but also about learning with them, and maybe finding future games with them.

What excites you about HTML5?
PD: I see parallels with the Flash games movement of years back – and we originally thrived off the back of that. The ability to go to a website, click play and give something a go is not to be underestimated, even today. And when I look to HTML5 it's the same – no downloads, no waiting.

I believe if we follow what that means HTML5 becomes a game changer.
Robbert van Os: It's a technology at its basic form, but it enables much more than just running games – it stretches to mobiles and tablets, and takes away the barriers between those platforms.

And to end-users that is invisible, so they don't even know – but it's significant for us. That platform agnostic approach also saves money – you only build a game once with HTML5. I think reusing something you've made for mobile on the desktop is a huge part of why it's so attractive.

A lot of game developers are switching to technologies that just make it easier to make games, and crossplatform. Also, HTML5 is open, it's not a commercial environment. I think that's a huge strength for the near future.

PD: Also, Spil has managed to reach a really large audience of both people new to games and 'gamers', and HTML5 offers the chance to keep expanding.

You've said before that up to 40 per cent of PC games will be HTML5 soon – that's a big claim. Who will drive that change? How will that migration happen?
RvO: It's down to the end-user, but they will not really know about that technology. So the responsibility lies with companies like Spil.

PD: The thing is that HTML5 is being pushed by some big forces already; organisations like Google, Zynga, and so on. That creates huge momentum for games running in HTML5.

> ***"It's a technology at its basic form, but it enables much more than just running games – it stretches to mobiles and tablets, and takes away the barriers."***
>
> Robbert van Os, Spil Games

Those are companies outside of the traditional games space, though. Does that matter? Do the console publishers need to acknowledge the emergence of what is effectively a new platform?
PD: It's an advantage for us that they are stuck on consoles – the same as back when we are advanced in Flash games and those companies were slow to catch on there. But HTML5 is moving quicker – I think eventually everyone will adopt it when it comes to this kind of game.

Spil's at the front lines of casual games. After the growth of that category, how has the audience changed?
PD: Females are still the biggest chunk of players, be that with our games on portals or Facebook. What's happened is that the audience has become broader, larger and smarter – but the make-up of it hasn't changed so much.

You moved onto Facebook recently. How successful has that been for Spil? It's a crowded market – your main rival in terms of PC web games, Zynga, is hugely dominant there.
RvO: We have some differentiators there, I think – we have an app for the site that provides access to a range of our games. We also have a games community of other players. There's a real emphasis on multiplayer gaming.
PD: Yes, many say that Facebook is competitive – and it is. But if you find an angle like that, and Zynga's games for instance aren't about multiplayer the way ours are, you will be a success.

Q&A: Michael Mahemoff, Chrome Developer Advocate

A key leader from the web giant's developer relations team, working with third-parties making HTML5 content for the Chrome App Store, he answered our questions on the Google's game plan, working with the industry, and the convergence of developer cultures…

Above: Google's Michael Mahemoff is personally invested in the buzz around the HTML5 platform

There's been a sudden uptake of HTML5 gaming – why?
It's since we announced the Chrome webstore, and HTML5 as a buzzword took off. I like it having that buzz – it's not necessarily the official Google line, it's something I personally advocate. But HTML5 speaks to what games are very well – and the opportunities Canvass presents means good things for gamers. That combined with the new avenues to purchase new apps and content through PCs and mobile, when you combine that delivery with the development environment for the industry there is a real opportunity.

Has there been an increase in the number of games companies you have spoken to?
Yes, definitely. In the build up to the launch of the store, my main role has been working with partners in other companies developing cool games. We've gone to many of them and said that from the start if they commit to HTML5 we can give them good, early information. It's not exclusive to games – that door is open to any company that is interested in selling apps – but for games specifically there is real excitement there. Now, someone with a cool idea for a game can make and sell it quickly through the web.

Plus, we're also working hard with games for Android. So on mobile you have apps for Android – where games is certainly already one of the most popular categories – and HTML5 content.

What I find interesting is how quickly the interfaces have developed and how sophisticated online games have become – and HTML5 can help that move even faster.

There's a debate about the actual specifications of HTML5 – and understandably so given it isn't finalised yet. What's your view on the components it should or shouldn't include?
Much of it is arbitrary, to be honest, which is why I often say to developers that I am reluctant to define what HTML5 is. What's important is that people understand the various things it brings together are available for them to use if they want – such as CSS3, geo-location, offline storage, and so on. As we have thrashed out what HTML5 is, things have been taken out and put in – the developers, really, will define what it is.

How do games fit into what a broad web company like Google does?
It's funny, you read all these rumours about what Google will do in games, but we are already working with game developers – we are up front about it. People play games online, and we are online.

And we're definitely hiring in people from the games industry so we can better understand its conventions and skill set. I come from the web world of javascript and so have had to skill up my knowledge. That's something a company like Google, which is getting closer into games, definitely knows it needs to understand.

> ***"HTML5 is a great example of the new way of thinking – about collectively defining and deciding some standards that will help us all go forward."***
>
> Michael Mahemoff, Google

Google has always had an experience on faster user interfaces, clean design – games haven't traditionally been that way.

But there's a crossover now, and we're talking to all sorts of people when it comes to HTML5, which is increasingly relevant to games and other entertainment. Things like interface design and user experience, fonts, or even just bigger media organisations. A lot of things are simply coming together and matching up. That's certainly something HTML5 encourages, too.

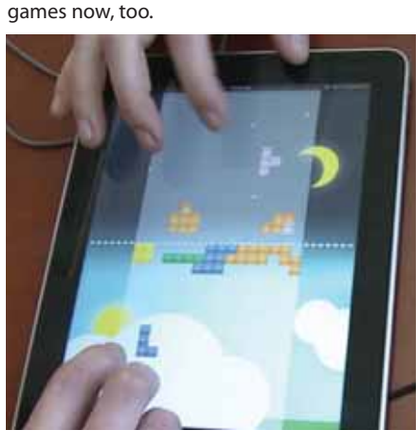
What kind of feedback have you had from game developers about HTML5?
One of the biggest grumbles is about the basic fact of browser fragmentation and inconsistency – IE6 is still out there in the wild and popular; the British government has said it will be using it up to 2014. That's a big challenge, and creates an immediate barrier.

But there are other web issues that developers are also learning about – things as basic as SEO to make sure content, be that games or not, is easily found, right up to client-side storage.

And there are questions about how audio is addressed with HTML5 – it's still quite basic. Where's that up to? Audio is a key component in many games, after all.
It's already being solved and will be cracked; there are people in-house at Mozilla and Apple already trying their own solutions, so I don't think it will be too long before that becomes more advanced. It will certainly be well ahead of the final specifications.

That's one area where the open, collaborative nature of the web and HTML5 have really proven themselves – there's a group of companies that compete but also work together for the best implementations. HTML5 is a great example of the new way of thinking – about collectively defining and deciding some standards that will help us all go forward. Because you can't second-guess developers and what they might do with technology. Hack days like this Game Jam are proof of that too.

You say 'hack day', when the games industry says 'Game Jam'. That seems to expose a real difference in how web developers and game developers approach thing.
Definitely. There's an ethos of tinkering and playing around with content that's endemic to web development that is a bit different. I remember when I first 'got' web coding, and I made something that someone on the other side of the world was then able to see, change and fire back to me. That's very unique – but it's something happening in games now, too.



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Breaking Through

Square Enix is knocking down international boundaries in an attempt to establish the first truly global game developer. **Rob Crossley** talks to a trio of studio heads and three CEOs to find out more about the ambitious plan…

Above: With titles like Deus Ex: Human Revolution in the pipeline, Square Enix's future looks strong

Charles Darwin put it like this: It's not the strongest that survive, nor the smartest, but the ones most responsive to change. That's possibly the best advice you could offer in the modern games industry, which itself is evolving at a speed and volatility few had prepared for.

Take, for example, the dinosaur-sized EA, which has been bleeding money for fifteen consecutive financial quarters. Or even the nimbler independent studios such as Realtime Worlds, Free Radical and Grin, which all met extinction in the last two years.

With the stakes pushed to an all-time high, so far it has been the social and mobile companies – such as the infamous Zynga and *Angry Birds* powerhouse Rovio – which have been most successfully responsive to a games market in a rapid state of flux.

But for Square Enix the belief remains that the old triple-A studio model can still thrive; it just needs to change.

The company's president, Yoichi Wada, explains to *Develop* that triple-A game businesses needs to expand their view, or get caught in the margins: "There are many companies out there who focus business on America and Europe, and there are some companies which focus on Japan – nobody but us covers both," he says with clear sense of pride.

"What we want to do is create something globally appealing. And if our development teams can create something that appeals to a global audience, I think that is the next step in our business".

INTERNATIONAL AMBITION

Square Enix believes that its studios – dotted across the US, Canada, Europe and China – can work together in building new, globally-focused, successful franchises.

Early in 2009 CEO Wada wouldn't have had the resources to approach such task, but just a few months into last year the Japanese RPG specialist had sealed a £84m acquisition of Britsoft publisher Eidos, and became a transcontinental enterprise almost overnight. No one knew at the time how deep an impact that had on Square Enix's new studios.

"Wada-San is very curious about Eidos Montreal," says the Canadian studio's general manager, Stephane D'Astous. "In fact, with all the studios in Europe and the US – he took a lot of time out to visit each studio. In about the space of a year, I'd say he had about 40 people fly over from Tokyo.

> ***"I think that at the global level now, we have to encourage cross-studio collaboration, but that hasn't been forced from the get-go."***
>
> Phil Rogers, Square Enix

"At a certain point after the acquisition, I remember we had people from Square Enix fly over every month – from different departments – to take a look at our company and how we operate. We had people from IT, HR, development – we had all kinds of people come over and take a look."

This marked the beginnings of Square Enix's ambitious new battleplan; to save costs by sharing technology and information between teams, and widen opportunities by spreading products across the boundaries of numerous continents.

D'Astous has that philosophy drilled into him, but he's not ignoring the risks: "In our future projects we'll have to look very carefully at how we can build games of global appeal in all territories. The danger is that you lose focus if you spread your game to appeal to different cultures, so it's a fine line to walk."

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

Square Enix Europe CEO Phil Rogers says the firm has taken great care in implementing fundamental changes to an operation of its size, and insists the weight of this global ambition won't rest on the shoulders of any single studio.

"I think, at the global level now, we have to encourage cross-studio collaboration, but that hasn't been forced from the get-go," he tells *Develop*.

Rogers suggests that changes have been made by leading from the front, by exhibiting what can be done, rather than through a send-to-all email entitled 'new philosophy'.

"Across Square Enix we have this collaborative process that has been led by certain teams working together, and it has created a healthy intrigue from our studios," he reveals.

"When all our teams see the result of that collaboration, it creates a whole new kind of vision for our studios to work more closley with each other.

"So the pace of our collaborative work has started quite slowly with purpose, but for the next 12 months there will be a lot of great collaboration going on.

"We have international meetings based in Tokyo, with studios travelling from North America, and vice-versa. What's most

impressive is that it doesn't feel forced. It's quite natural, and that's important to get initiatives driving."

There's tremendous potential for saving costs and improving product through collaboration, says D'Astous. He explains that the *Deus Ex* project is being built with an engine made by Crystal Dynamics, but the studio received more than a good editor.

"There's some really good tech there, but the best thing is that the whole project got a kick-start because the Crystal Dynamics team helped us figure out how to use it all. We're sharing a lot of data, a lot of tech, and a lot of best-practices among each of the studios. That's what happens at the start, and when a project's in place we branch off from the group and do our own thing."

He insists, however, that this engine share was Eidos Montréal's preference, and not a case of enforced hand-me-downs from within the Square Enix group.

"Of course, as Eidos Montreal's general manager, I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket. It's risky if you focus too much on one technology, so *Deus Ex* uses Crystal Dynamics tech, while our other project, *Thief 4*, won't.

"It's certainly much easier to recruit people if you use a standard external third-party tool, so we have looked at this for *Thief*."

GLOBAL COLLABORATION

So tech is not being enforced from the top down, it seems. Wada admits that, with this philosophy implemented across the entire company, third-party tool use has not been so easy to encourage back in Japan.

"We have worked very hard to convince our developers to use external tools more, but in actuality our teams very seldom used them," he says.

"Over the past three years I think our people have just begun at last to have more understanding for external tool use. I don't think using external tools will necessarily bring costs down – some of them can be very expensive. What's most important is the standardisation, for all our studios to use common tech within."

Rogers steps in: "There's a lot of tech sharing, and we bring our studio general managers together on a very regular basis and look at all our projects together, but we try to strike a balance of having focus within our individual teams, and at the same time have those teams talk to each other. We really can't force that. We can't just force cross-border partnerships. In a way, our collaboration is driven by a need to solve problems, a need for different solutions."

> ***"There's a lot of tech sharing, and we bring our studio general managers together on a very regular basis and look at all our projects together."***
>
> Yoichi Wada, Square Enix

Example? How about that *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* trailer? The one that launched at E3 and single-handedly pushed the game's hype to mountainous heights.

It was made, D'Astous explains, somewhere thousands of miles away from Eidos Montreal, within another segment of the Square Enix group.

"One of our first collaborative efforts with Square Enix was with Visual Works [the firm's Tokyo-based CG movie production department], who made the trailer for *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* that everyone went crazy about," he says.

"People loved the video, it won so many awards at E3, so as you might of guessed, so far I've been very happy to collaborate."

From *Develop's* discussions with all the general managers of Square Enix's studios, it's apparent that this philosophy of collaboration is now fully embedded into studio culture.

Nils Jorgensen, the general manager at Denmark studio IO Interactive, makes that abundantly clear.

"The future games market is going to be global. It is a target audience that crosses national borders," Jorgensen says. "And at IO we actually have to employ a lot of foreign talent to the studio. I'd say more than 30 per cent of our employees are from countries other than Denmark.

"In all I think we have people from more than 20 different countries here. So the atmosphere and culture is quite international, and I think it's easier for us to develop games that are for a broader market, because we understand a lot of different cultures."

AMERICAN DREAM

Few know this, but Square Enix now has a small development team based out in Los Angeles, working under the management of the firm's new US CEO Mike Fischer.

Fischer tells *Develop* that a start-up team like this, in particular, can greatly benefit from Square Enix's global-studio philosophy.

"Because they are a small team you don't necessarily have a wealth of resources," he says, "but what makes it happen is that there

From left: Final Fantasy 13, the latest console release in a series that has long crossed cultural borders in terms of its appeal

Far right: The top brass. Square Enix US CEO Mike Fischer, company president Yoichi Wada, Phil Rogers, CEO of the European division and Eidos Montréal general manger Stephane D'Astous

things across the whole Eidos organisation that they can rely on – from usability testing teams all the way through to senior technology mentoring.

"None of this we had access to before the acquisition."

Fischer, who was appointed in July, points out that this collaboration isn't just within its development teams.

"There's an experienced licensing person who's been at Eidos for years," he says. "I'm reaching out to him now to look at some licensing opportunities for other IP as well."

Of course, this issue of IP – and indeed new IP - may prove to be the open window in Square Enix's carefully-built fortress. The three CEOs tell *Develop* they want the firm to become a top-three publisher within five years by leveraging its own brands and, possibly, creating new ones. This, of course, is a plan against an era where only top licenses and star-IP are fully trusted to sell.

Jorgensen, however, believes other studios will envy the challenge his studio faces: "We developed the *Hitman* IP, *Kane & Lynch*, *Mini Ninjas* and F*reedom Fighters* back in 2002 with EA. That our games have made it as movies shows the potential of the IP that we create,"

"We've just been allowed to build this incubation department at our studio. Its sole purpose is to look at new IPs and how we can evolve existing IPs. The great thing about our partnership with other studios is that we can meet colleagues to discuss some of our different ideas or help each other solve problems. It's really inspiring, actually."

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Darrell Gallagher, the studio head at Crystal Dynamics, explains that his studio has already evolved one of Square Enix's most iconic IPs.

"The question for us is how can we bring creativity and innovation to the *Tomb Raide*r franchise," he says. "It was important for us that the *Tomb Raider* games had changed their direction – we want to be excited by what we do at work, and that will resonate externally. If we're excited by a game, so will our audience be."

Gallagher insists that, despite Square Enix undergoing a top-to-bottom transformation, there remains much faith in *Tomb Raider*.

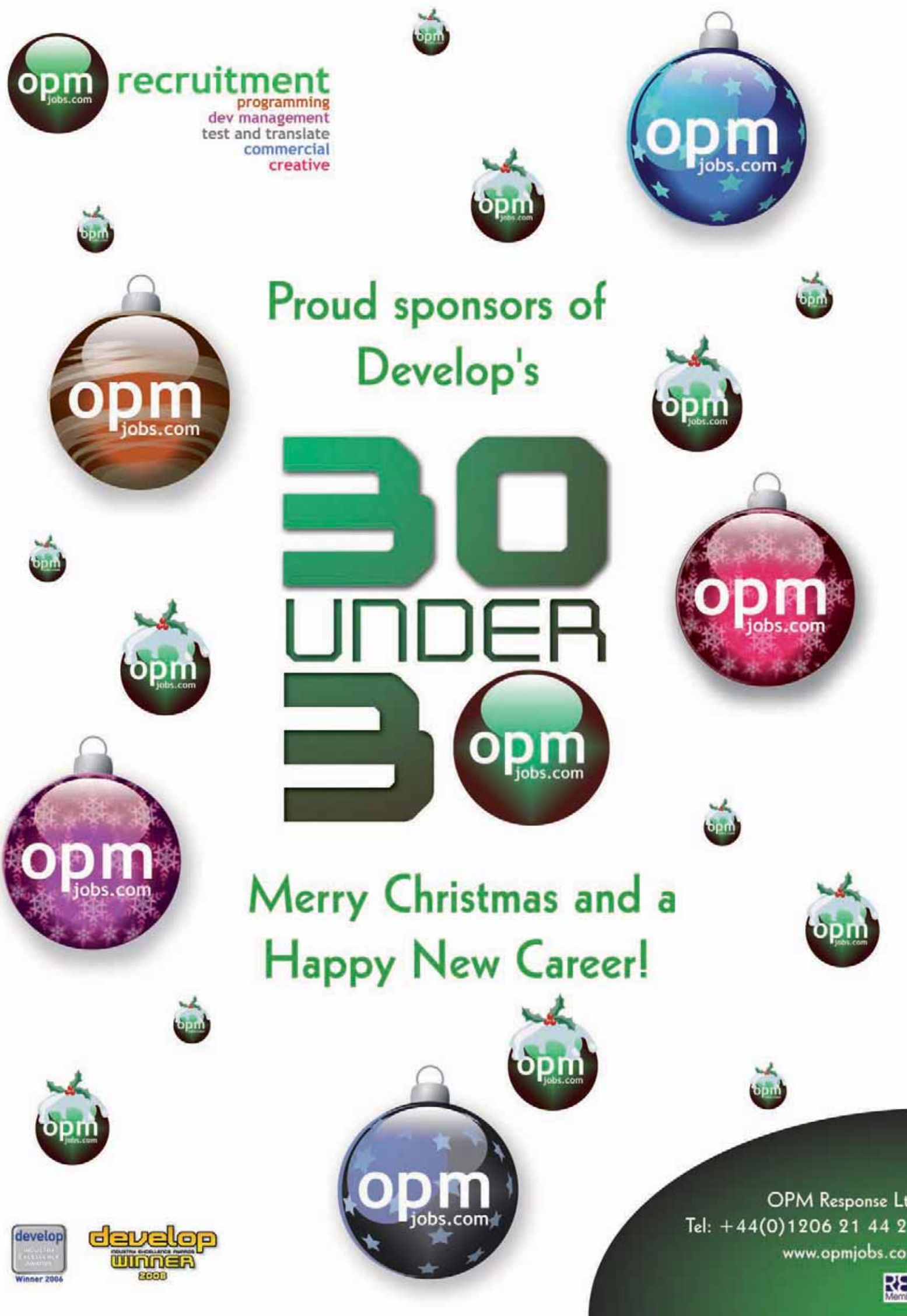
> ***"The future games market is going to be global. It is a target audience that crosses national borders. At IO we employ a lot of foreign talent."***
>
> Nils Jorgensen, IO Interactive

"Lara still resonates very strongly with the audience," he says. "As a character she's up there with Mario in terms of audience recognition – I think they're head-to-head. So I think it's really important that we keep the IP fresh and don't rest on our laurels."

Not resting on one's laurels perhaps defines the mood best at Square Enix, a publisher that seems to be fully appreciating just how much the industry has shifted and scattered in the last five years.

Even in regards to cross-studio collaboration – something which is clearly being championed by everyone at the top of the company – CEO Wada is not putting all in one basket.

"I do not think that cross-studio collaboration is indispensible for Square Enix projects, but it is something we should have," he says. "And since nobody else has the resource for east-west collaboration like we do, I think this can be the differentiating factor for the company."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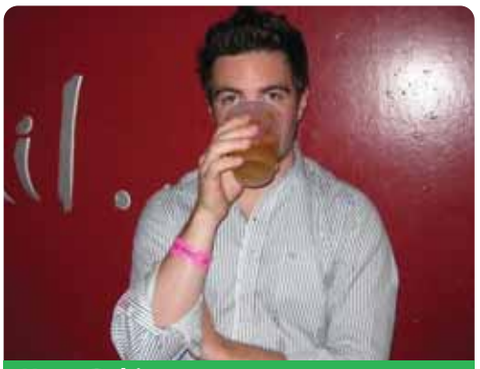
Proving that you don't have to remember the release of Space Invaders to establish a reputation in the industry, **Will Freeman** shines Develop's talent spotlight on 30 youthful professionals shaping the future of games…



Harry Robinson

Producer, Rare

Robinson has worked at Rare for over two years. In that time he has been a whirlwind of creativity, inspiration and organisation. Nominated in part for his role ensuring *Kinect Sports* hit the shelves on time and in such good quality, the 27-year-old is, according to his colleague, 'the future of how good creative production can be in the development of games'.

Christopher Burgess

Senior Programmer, SCEE

At 29 years old, Burgess has been a key element in putting together a managed localisation solution available for use throughout the Sony World Wide Studios, available to both internal and external developers; a system that has to date been used on over 70 projects. It's not been an easy job, but his humour and dedication has seen him through all the highs and lows.

Peter Collier

Senior level designer, Bizarre Creations

Nominated because he pushes his senior teammates to 'greater heights', Collier has brought knowledge beyond his years to Bizarre Creations. A true team player, the 28-year-old has alsoimpressed with his understanding of what happens behind the doors of the biggest publishers on the planet and how to help get them the information they need.

Scott John Siegel

Game Designer, Playdom

John Siegel has rapidly established a reputation across the globe as a considerable intellect in the realm of game design. Currently focused on social games, John Siegel got his first job in the by attending a development conference where walked directly up to a company CEO and said: 'My name is Scott Jon Siegel and I'm the game designer you've been looking for'. They hired him.

Andrew John Smith

Managing Director, Spilt Milk Studios

Yes, Andrew was in the '30 Under 30' last year, but back then he was a designer at Proper Games. Now he's MD at Spilt Milk Studios, which has in eight months attracted several successful contracts. Andrew is single-handedly managing to keep his new business afloat in the current economic climate while designing and delivering original games. Impressive stuff.

Dave Bailey

Managing Director, Mediatonic

Bailey co-founded the successful Mediatonic business aged 21 years old while studying at university, and helped the company move from its student digs to upmarket offices in Westminster. Now 26, Dave employs almost 30 people, and Mediatonic's wide ranging portfolio includes work for major publishers such as EA, Disney and Sega.

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Mike Bithell

Designer, Blitz Game Studios

25-year-old designer Bithell, who was vital to the development of *Dead to Rights*, is an important member of Blitz's business development team – his job is to create new game ideas and pitch proposals for publishers. He also recently archived stunning success with a game he created in less than 24 hours. Flash title *Thomas Was Alone* gained over 100,000 plays and was featured on the front page of online giant Kongregate.

Liam Wong

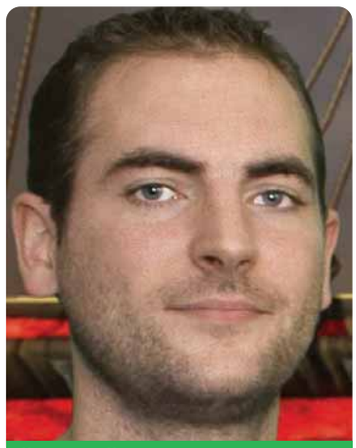
2D Artist, Crytek

At a youthful 23 years old, Wong is already carving a name for himself on Crytek's art team. Having pushed himself constantly after graduating from the University of Abertay, Wong has won a number of development competitions in the past 12 months. He also contributed towards *Colour Coded*, which was nominated for two BAFTAs. A true rising star, he currently spends his time toiling away on *Crysis 2*.

Will Luton

Creative Director, Mobile Pie

Proving that graduating from a game design course can set you in good stead for a career in the industry, Luton joined Mobile Pie after a spell at Sega Europe. There he picked up production credits for a number of triple-A games titles including *Space Siege* and *The Incredible Hulk*. Luton has been integral to his employer's success in the mobile sector, and has a reputation for making sure deadlines are met.



Steven Cannavan

Programmer, nDreams

A PlayStation Home and server programmer at nDreams, 28-year-old Cannavan has proved himself to be a huge talent way beyond his years professionally. He is regarded by his workmates as both a highly imaginative and good-natured employee, and has developed a superb track record within nDreams of repeatedly hitting deadlines. According to his colleagues 'he's got a big future ahead of him'.

Eric Hope

UX and Designer, Valve Software

Last year Hope starred in our 30 Under 30 as Apple User Experience Evangelist. Now he's back, making us break our 'only new people every year' rule as he has climbed ever upwards in just 12 months. Now he's a user experience specialist and designer at Valve Software, and according to his colleagues is 'an up-and-coming Steve Jobs, a creative dreamer and mastermind visionary with limitless potential'.

Matt Turner

Game Designer, Playground Games

Turner joined Playground Games in March this year after leaving Codemasters. Blessed with a knack for visual flow, he quickly impressed his colleagues, and has subsequently carved a valuable niche within Codemasters Racing Studio. According to Turner's managers, much of the slickness and pacing of titles such as *DiRT 2* and the BAFTA-winning *GRID* is down to the 27-year-old's unique skill set.

Angela McEwan

Motion Editor, Lightning Fish Games

A graduate in Computer Arts at the University of Abertay Dundee, McEwan serves as Lightning Fish Games' expert in fitness and dance moves. She is also one of the team's most talented motion editors at Lightning Fish. Having joined the studio in February of 2010, McEwan has quickly risen as a significant asset, and has made a huge impact. 'Angela will get stuck into anything we throw at her,' says a colleague.

Robert Karp

Associate Producer, XDev Studio Europe

Karp has served at Sony's XDev studio for five years, after a hard working start in the SCEE's outfit's QA department. Having moved into a production role he has worked on no less than 16 games in two years, including *Hustle Kings* and the much-anticipated shooter from Housemarque, *Dead Nation*. Karp has also invested a great deal of effort producing numerous titles for launch just in India.

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Orcun Adsoy

CEO, Distinction Games

22-year-old Adsoy set up Distinction Games while completing his Computer Games Technology BSc at the University of Portsmouth. A multitalented CEO, he serves as manager, producer, programmer and technical artist, and has worked on projects for companies like Blitz and Red Redemption. Now in his final year, Orcun has also spent time in Japan building contacts with Bandai Namco and Digital Hollywood University.

Richard Birkin

Producer, Mudlark

Birkin joined Mudlark three years ago after a spell at social network outfit Naked. Never before working in the games industry he soon led on a number of key games projects, and is now the senior producer on *Chromaroma*, the online social game that uses your Oyster Card Journeys as the basic currency. Now responsible for wrangling three different teams of developers into action Birkin also steers the executive production team.

Robin Lacey

Managing Director, Beatnik

Robin Lacey founded the independent development studio Beatnik Games three years ago. The company launched its critically-acclaimed first title, *Plain Sight*, in April 2010 on Steam and other digital distribution platforms. In 2009 Beatnik was commissioned by Channel 4 education to develop *Ada*, a science based adventure game, this is to be launched in Q1 2011. Beatnik Games has grown to 10 full-time employees.

Alex Tutty

Associate, Sheridans

Tutty specialises in computer games and works in the hugely respected computer games department at Sheridans. Since then Tutty has represented a large number of games developers on everything from publishing agreements to disputes and always provides first class commercial advice which has been invaluable to us. At 29, Tutty is best known for advising the team at Mobigames during the whole Langdell fiasco.

Patrik Liljecrantz

Technical Artist, Muskedunder Interactive

Despite Liljecrantz's young age he has already worked on over 50 flash and Unity games at Muskedunder. He has worked both directly for high expectation clients such as Disney, as well as on internal projects, including the studio's social game *Icy Tower*, which attracts over 1.5 million active users per month. 'Scrum-master' Liljecrantz also supports and mentors several teams at the studio.

Diane Lagrange

Co-founder and Consultant, ICO Partners

Having founded ICO Partners with former NCsoft co-worker Thomas Bidaux, 29-year-old Lagrange has brought a wealth of knowledge to the game industry. As NCsoft business development manager she preached the F2P model long before most studios had heard about it, and since she has developed a reputation with ICO's clients as a talented professional with a sharp analytical mind.

Charles Goodall

Business Development Executive, Testronic Labs

At just 19 Goodall joined Testronic Labs straight from school and immediately made an impact, demonstrating confidence and poise beyond his years. Now a key member of the games testing sales team, he has forged excellent relationships with many of the biggest names in the industry, sealing sizeable deals for testing services with clients across Europe and representing the company ably.

Matt Allsopp

Senior Concept Artist, Leading Light Design

Allsop has been on the team at game-focused specialist production design consultancy Leading Light Design more or less from the outset. There he has exerted his prodigious art skills and vision as a senior external concept artist on world beating triple-A projects including *Fable III* and *Killzone 2*. 'His art has had a telling impact in creating some of the most amazing video games,' says a colleague.

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Antubel Moreda

Associate Game Designer, PopCap Games Europe

Beginning his career in QA, game designer Moreda spent four years trying to break PopCap's games before assuming a design role so he could make new ones for the giant of the casual sector. He went above and beyond his QA role by adding significant creative value to the games he was testing, earning him the chance to design *Bejeweled Live*.

Matthew Warneford

Chief Technical Officer, Dubit Platform

Warneford has spent an impressive decade in development despite being just 27 years old. At just 18, he helped found the Dubit company with the aim of making media more interactive for young people. His work on the Dubit Platform has led to the company producing virtual worlds for the BBC, Cartoon Network and more.

Ed Fear

Production Associate and PR Manager, Curve Studios

Yes. That Ed. Former *Develop* deputy editor Fear made the unconventional jump from games journalist to studio production associate and PR manager at London studio Curve, where he has demonstrated an impressive ability to straddle the two disciplines his job title includes. He's currently hard at work on Explodemon.

Scott Williams

QA Manager, Ubisoft Reflections

Wanting in at the ground floor Williams started off as a games tester at Ubisoft, and apparently conceived a five-year plan for success. After working his way up the ladder and gaining experience at a number of different studios he came back to Ubisoft where he is renowned for being friendly, hard working and motivated.

Ben Furneaux

Designer, Turbulenz

Starting out as a user interface designer, Furneaux quickly bolted user experience designer to his title, and is now the chief designer on the Turbulenz gaming platform. Obsessed by socially connected games, and responsible for authouring every feature and pixel at the studio, he is known to his co-workers as being akin to 'the games industry's own Jony Ive'.

Charles 'Chuck' Griffiths

Designer, Lionhead

Chuck joined the design team at Lionhead some three years ago after working on the *Harry Potter* series at EA, and has developed a reputation for being highly skilled at his craft. He's passionate, hard working and always willing to give up his own time to further whatever the Lionhead team happen to be working on, his colleagues tell us.

Jerome Barbato

Art Director, Stonetrip

Jerome Barbato, 26, is art director at Stonetrip, the developer of the 3D engine ShiVa3D. Joining the French outfit in 2005, Jerome was involved in the very early stages of ShiVa3D, creating 3D models to be integrated in the engine. A core team member at Stonestrip, he handles every element of ShiVa3D's visual presentation from application design to demo creation.

Laetitia Amoros

Production Manager, Side

Amoros is a production manager at Side, where she has worked tirelessly with the likes of Lionhead, Sony and Bioware to ensure the voice production on their titles is of the highest quality. Amoros' ability to create bespoke script handling programs to assist the delicate and creative process of achieving great character performances in games has impressed many of Side's clients.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

No less worthy of mention, but victims of the overwhelming number of nominations, and our ruthless one-person-per-company rule, were the following:

Kieran Belkus, Environment Artist, Lightning Fish Games; **Adrian Smith**, Programmer, Lightning Fish Games; **Jim Constable**, Senior QA, Lightning Fish Games; **Michael Gluck**, President and CEO, VGMarket; **Adam Green**, Managing Director, Assyria; **Sam Van Tilburgh**, Senior Communities and Video Manager, Mircosoft, **Vincenzo Alagna**, iOS Specialist; **Jas Purewal**, Games Team Lawyer, Olswang; **Joachim Ante**, CTO, Unity; **Joe Dixon**, Programmer, Tag Games; **Scott Downie**, Programmer, Tag Games; **Tom Jubert**, Narrative Designer; **Brian Knox**, Senior Producer, En Masse Entertainment; **Guillaume Descamps**, Vice-President and CCO, Mindscape

Wishing all our clients and contractors a Very Merry Christmas!

GAME OPS

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Total **Development**

Content production studio Outso has turned to an unlikely inspiration in forming its development methodology. **Steve Riding** explains how the beautiful game lead to bettering the creative process…

Above: The Nottingham-based Outso team

For those too young to remember, the concept of 'Total Football' was exemplified by the superb Dutch football team of the 70s. Each player was so talented he could play almost any position.

We at Outso have applied this philosophy to game development. We like to call it 'Total Development'. We have adopted the opposite approach to the current trend of specialising roles in the team in which each developer has little or no influence on the development of both the game and company.

We have consciously chosen to work in field where we can keep the team relatively small and give them a huge amount of project development autonomy. We typically work on multiple projects, using the talents of our outsourcing partners when necessary.

Key to this strategy is what we look for in the recruitment of new members. We spend a great deal of time ensuring that we find people with a similar outlook to the rest of the company. They need to be smart, and have three vital ingredients that we believe make great developers; passion, commitment and discipline. It is then up to us to recognise that we have some very smart people and to treat them with the respect they deserve.

DELIVERING THE GOODS

This approach has led to the over-delivery in almost every occasion due to the commitment and passion shown by the team. Every project is notably better than the previous project. The flexible small team approach coincidentally leads to highly efficient development with hardly any money wasted, which helps keep the company highly competitive at all times.

In order to explain how this works in practice I'll give a quick example of how a typical project works within Outso.

With the *Assassins Creed* Home Space, we firstly receive a short brief so the pitch team will research and fully understand the IP and needs of our partners. We then put together some very high level designs; these designs can come from anybody within the team and are tuned to the IP by the design manager.

> ***"We have consciously chosen to work in the field where we can keep the team relatively small and give them a huge amount of autonomy"***

Once into development the team is given free hand to take this initial seed and expand it into a fully realised game. Of course the design is checked at the sprint review stage and by both our design team and our partners. By having artists and coders with great understanding of gaming, this is possible, which is all part of the concept of Total Development. Communication and responsibility is also central to the success of these small agile teams, and it is no surprise that all teams operate using pragmatic scrum with the producer coordinating the efforts of team and enabling them to succeed.

TRIED AND TESTED

Continuing with the concept of Total Development we have a very smart QA team that can perform multiple roles ranging from focus testing, video production, audio, customer experience analysis. Every member of the QA team can do multiple tasks as we choose to place the emphasis on the quality of the team rather than numbers.

A major byproduct of empowering the teams is that over the last few years the they have developed several embryonic businesses that are now expanding into fully-fledged enterprises of their own. Lockwood Publishing was created to publish a range retail items and in-house IPs on PlayStation Home. Playmetrix, which was created out of the necessity to monitor the behaviour of users within Sodium, is a world-class technology in the final stages of preparation to be released as a fully commercial product.

We believe the success of the company is in part having a smart and talented team members who can shape products and understand the importance of hitting dates.

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BUILD

THE LATEST TOOLS NEWS, TECH UPDATES & TUTORIALS

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Montréal United

We travel to Canada for Unity's yearly conference, p54

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United front

Last month Unity revealed its Asset Store and the Union distribution model. **Will Freeman** joined the crowds outside the Marché Bonsecours in Montréal to find out what the announcements mean for game development

AS WINTER takes hold in the cosmopolitan city of Montréal, a crowd of fashionable game developers are gathering on a picturesque cobbled backstreet.

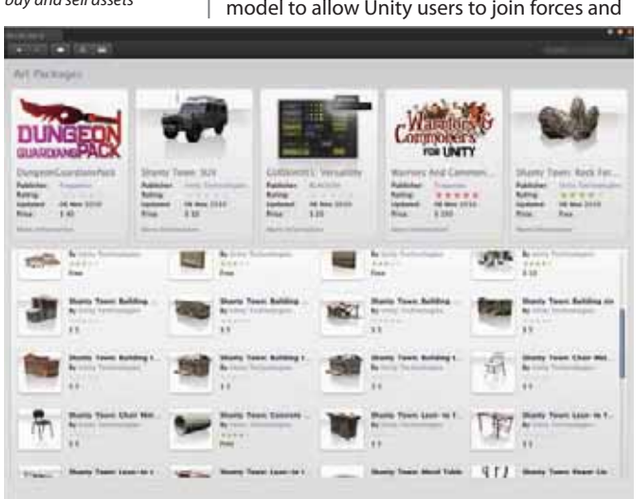
The doors are about to open on Unite; the annual conference run by the creators of Unity for its users.

An hour later, and the attendees are in silence, as Unity's amiable CEO David Helgason and his entourage deliver their one-two punch at the Unite keynote.

First out the bag is the announcement and immediate launch of Unity Asset Store, which has been conceived to allow users to buy and sell content, code and other digital matter through a panel inside the engine's front end.

And then, without a second wasted, Union has been confirmed. Initially something of a mysterious entity, Union is in fact a business model to allow Unity users to join forces and reach new platforms, such as the set top boxes and web enabled TVs that many are eyeing as the next potential boom area for the kinds of games that have enjoyed such success so far in browser and on the iPhone and iOS.

Below: Unity's new Asset Store allows developers to buy and sell assets



SETTING UP SHOP

But what exactly is the Asset Store, and what does Union really mean? Both are extensions of Unity's continued democratisation of game development, and both came from the tech outfit's desire to empower its community and flesh out the infrastructure supporting the popular SDK.

> ***"You can make technology as simple as you can – even then most people can't make games. We always knew about those problems."***

"This comes from a problem we see with content," says Helgason of the Asset Store. "You can make technology as simple as you can – and we're not done with making Unity simpler and easier to use – but even then most people can't make games, because you need all these skill sets. We always knew about those problems, and the invention of Unity Asset Store came as something of a lightning strike into the head of our co-founder Nicholas Francis."

Of course, the Torque engine offered an asset marketplace through its official website, but Unity's spin on the store as available 'in-engine' makes it unique. The Unity Asset Store is much like the consumer end of the App Store, although it offers an open model that should make it far easier to sell content. Among the 70 items on sale in the first day were art packs, tutorials and Unity upgrades as ambitious as a new graphics assets shader. Sales of those items hit $5,000 in the initial 24 hours of the store going live, suggesting there's plenty of potential to make money providing content for the store.

But isn't Unity taking a risk, opening the doors of accessibility wider still, giving the users the keys to the castle and allowing them to build a business and extend the engine's remit?

"With any innovative technology today you want to give absolutely as much possible power as you can to the users, without breaking your own model," insists Helgason.

"In Unity we realised that with a few more editions and extensions to the editor, anybody could create new parts to the editor on the same APIs we used to make it. We thought 'do we loose anything from that?', and the obvious answer is 'absolutely not'."

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Admirable stuff, but what of the reaction from Unity's users? To describe Alex

Above: Attendees mingle on the conference floor

Schwartz, co-founder of start-up Owlchemy Labs, as a typical Unity user would be rather unfair, but he certainly epitomises the kind of developer Unity is famous for courting. He has turned his back on triple-A to set up a grass roots indie, and is a passionate contributor to the Unity community via in his role heading up the Boston Unity Group.

But his reaction to the Asset Store is typical of the mood at Unite: "My immediate reaction to the Asset Store was to call my business partner right away and get him to get the editor scripts he had written up there. Just to get stuff on there to sell. Seeing the monetisation aspect of what the Asset Store can do was instant.

"It's perfect for small studios right now. Because of our small size we want to be in there right now, at the bleeding edge moment. We can do that too, because we don't have to go through a chain of command like I was used to at a 100-person company. We can just do this right now."

Others, though, are quick to warn that something like the Asset Store could potentially lead to a homogenisation of game design. "Asset store is going to prove to be very powerful, but honestly, I like games to be more original, and have content created by their own teams," says Martin Repetto, developer at Atmosphir creator Minor Studios. But I do understand that there are very small teams of around two or three people that don't even have an artist. Those guys will do great."

But Repetto is quick to point towards the potential of the Asset Store as a tool for the rapid prototyping of game ideas, and even more optimistic about the potential saving with regard to buying and using Unity upgrades and new features available through the marketplace.

"For Atmosphir we've actually had to develop a lot of tools for Unity; one to integrate animations and tools to allow character customisation on the fly. We've had to build these ourselves. If this had been available sooner maybe we could have bought some stuff," say the developer, who ends with a prediction: "It's not going to be assets that dominate the new store, but code that allows you to expand your editor."

> ***"My immediate reaction to the Asset Store was to call my business partner right away and get him to get the editor scripts he had written up there."***

The Asset Store has also piqued the continuing interest of several of the numerous service companies that have managed to secure work with the expansive Unity customer base. Character animation specialist Mixamo, which has been working closely with Unity for some time now, is quick to highlight its vision for what it can do through the store.

"I think that the asset store is a big revolution, because it is opening up the door for content to be applied regularly in the game development environment in Unity," says Mixamo's CTO and co-founder Stefano Corazza. "For Mixamo in particular it will be very interesting. Usually users have to upload a big file before we apply the motion and retarget it automatically after they have customised it, and then it can be downloaded into the game engine. They have to buy before they see how a motion will look in a game."

Things are set to change though. Mixamo is currently working on a system that will instead let its users select a character, before going to the Asset Store and access a special 'widget' so it can stream the motion data directly into the game environment.

"That point will be the first time in history where you can test an animation in your game development environment even before you buy it. That will be gigantic," concludes Corazza.

UNITED WE STAND

While the reaction to Unity Asset Store was generally optimistic and enthusiastic, Union initially caused a little more confusion at Unite. Across the industry the worlds of distribution are in a state of flux, and the new platforms jostling for attention on the horizon are many. But, says Helgason, it was the unsettled future that inspired the creation of the collaboration scheme.

"Smart people that have been in the industry a long time and understand the value of content kept telling us 'go into

Above: Unity CEO and co-founder David Helgason

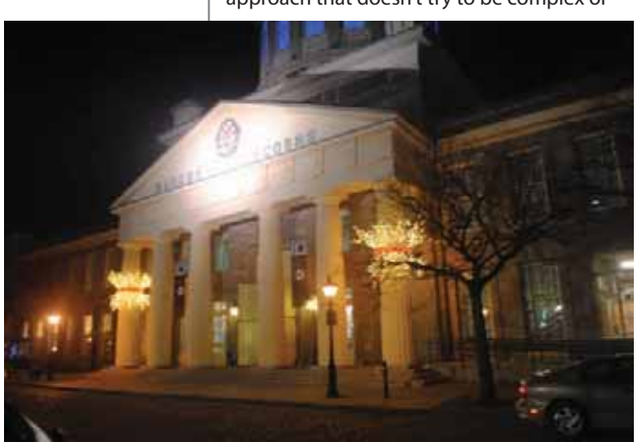
publishing'," admits the CEO, adding: "but for us that felt weird and wrong. That was because all the publishing models we knew were somewhere between annoying and overly complex."

But Helgason and his colleagues also saw many new opportunities arising, and realised that the method of selling Unity licences to developers via the established model wouldn't be able to capture those prospects. Considering that it is becoming increasingly hard to identify how many platforms are likely to emerge, and how many will thrive, a new approach was needed, and that approach is Union.

"Suddenly we saw a model," says Helgason. "A model which is explicitly not publishing, but some other animal; some kind of aggregation of things. We saw space for a Unity-style model; a primarily technical approach that doesn't try to be complex or get in the way of others, and enables something that wasn't possible before."

The final realisation came when the Unity team began looking at their developer customers as a whole. As one entity the 260,000 Unity users – 80,000 of whom had used the engine in the past month at the time of Unite – have made perhaps as many hit games than any of the big mobile publishers. So why couldn't they act as one entity, wondered Helgason. Unity's VP of strategy Brett Seyler now heads up the Union operation as general manager.

> ***"Smart people that have been in the industry a long time and understand the value of content keep telling us 'go into publishing'. That felt wrong."***



DISTRIBUTING KNOWLEDGE

"Union is a distribution service that helps developers get their game to platforms and markets," explains Seyler.

"We, for the last year, have been approached by lots and lots of buyers from people and companies who make consumer devices or that have relationships with those consumers that they have, and they want games to put on the platforms that they have; either new platforms or channels that haven't really had games on them up to now, like web TVs."

Of course, Unity wouldn't be able to open a door for developers to reach any new platforms by simply porting the entirety of the Unity SDK and adding a new build target in the menu.

"Some of this stuff is just so new or so unproven or even just unknown that it's really hard for us to go and tell developers to take a risk and buy a version Unity after the release of a new device because there's a chance of success there," confirms Seyler.

"We really don't have sufficient confidence in every existing platform there is to be always extending our model in that way. So we have a new way that is both significantly less risky for us and less risky for developers as well."

By porting just enough of the Unity SDK to a new platform to enable the flawless running of something in the region of 200 games, Unity will then be able to offer that platform's owners a bespoke package of games. By handling all of the porting of its games in-house, Unity will be in effect delivering its customers' titles to new platforms without them having to do anything, in return for an 80/20 per cent revenue spilt in the favour of the developer.

Opting in will also be free for the developers interested in Union, and Unity will evaluate all of the submitted games before pitching the specially crafted portfolios out

Above: Unity's VP of strategy Brett Seyler

A TRIPLE-A FUTURE?

UNITY ISN'T just the reserve of hip indie studios and fearless microstudios. Thanks to its capability as a rapid prototyper, the giants of the triple-A space are also beginning to show interest in the engine.

"Early on I never myself viewed triple-A as very important," admits Unity CEO David Helgason. "I saw so many other opportunities for us, and the triple-A guys have got it so squared away, I thought 'why should we even bother to try?'

"But we have a lot of incredible engineers at Unity, and maybe I failed to tell those engineers that they didn't need to care about triple-A. Many had come from triple-A studios, and they hadn't lost their skills of course."

Those engineers began to create much of what is required for triple-A, writing a 'very modern' deferred renderer and changing the shader pipeline to be more flexible. Add to that the fact that Unity CTO Joachim Ante licensed some of the most popular triple-A middleware including Umbra, Fmod, and Beast, and everything is in place to woo the development giants.

"All those things together showed me that there is nothing really holding us back from that edge, except maybe a little bit of time," says Helgason.

to a number of publishers across platforms, and even digital portal owners.

INDIE THINKING

"What is really interesting about it is that Union is looking at things like set-top boxes and the move to different kinds of platforms in the future," says Minor Studio's creative director Dave Werner.

> ***"Anything that helps a developer to reach the market, I'm all for it. That's how it is. If Union can help me get on every platform, I'm going to want to be there."***

"One of the biggest appeals of going to Unity for us was the ability to move to different platforms if we wanted to without having to start from scratch each time. I'm very excited about web TV and set-top boxes becoming more popular in the next five years, an it's great that Unity seems to have the foresight to look at that and have something in place.

"Anything that helps a developer to reach the market, I'm all for it," adds Repetto.

"That's how it is. If Union can help me get on every platform that might be, from an aeroplane to a car, I'm going to want to be there. That's just a no brainer."

There is, however, a murmer of caution from smaller developers enamoured by the freedom of running an independent studio, such as Owlchemy Labs' Schwartz: "I hope they don't do things incorrectly in how they implement Union, so somebody we don't know pitches our game to somebody else we don't know. For us being indie is about taking on responsibility for ourselves, and maybe Union could take that away from us and give it to other people. "

But Seyler is confident that Union's structure will not in any way be undermining the independence of the kinds of studios that have gathered around Unity in recent years: "If a developer is concerned about 'giving their game to us' and feeling like its not theirs' any more, I'd say 'it is still yours'. You don't have to be in the program if you don't want to, and you don't have to stay in the program."

Seyler is also exceedingly confident that Union can and will become a money-making enterprise for its participants.

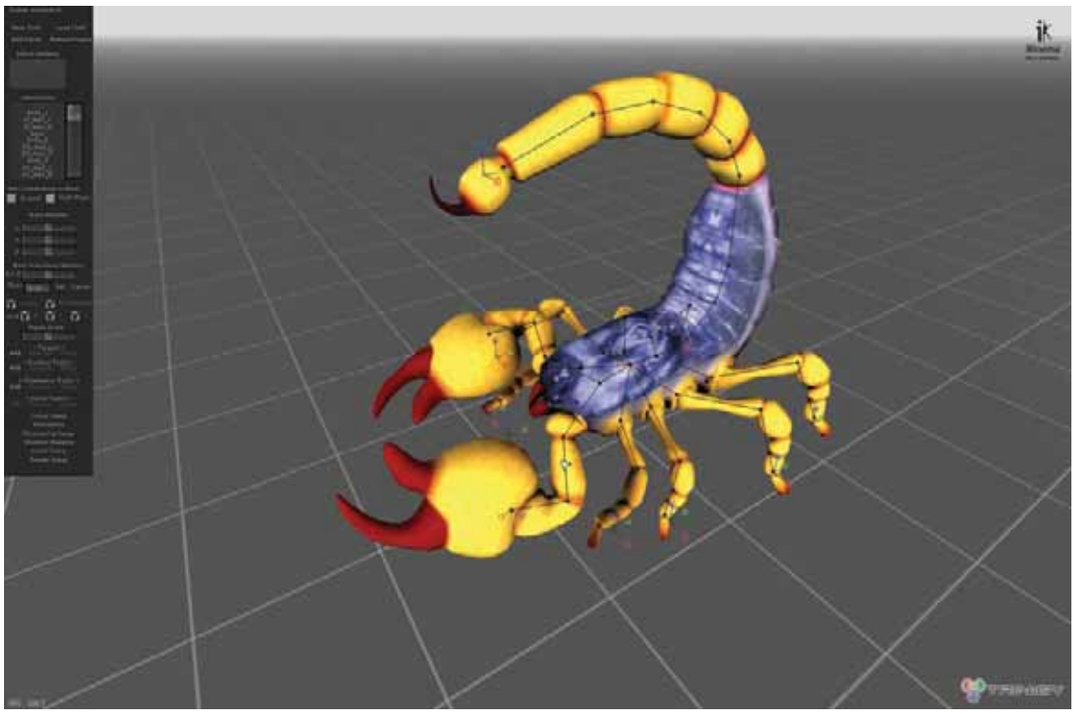
And as Unite's busy schedule draws to a close, and the developer throng make their way to the exits, the prevailing mood matching Seyler's optimism. It's clear that Unity's customer base have faith in the company on which many have built their careers, and with a collective effort it seems that Union and the Unity Asset Store have every chance of becoming the kind of success stories the engine firm is famous for.

unity3d.com/unite/

KEY RELEASE

Will Freeman Looks at IKinema's 'fast and flexible' animation offering

WHAT IS IT?: An animation engine add-on that allows creature customisation in the pipeline
COMPANY: IKinema
PRICE: See web
www.ikinema.com



Above: IKinema is available as middleware in its own right, or as plug-in for Maya and Vision Engine. Other versions are also in production

Above: IKinema's strentgh, say its creators, is in its flexibility with regard to the creatures it can animate and customise within a given pipeline

IKINEMA IS a company that knows how to make developers feel good about where their profession sits in the grand scheme of the universe.

Its animation technology started life at the Surrey Space Centre, where, in its rudimentary form, it was crafted as a tool to control satellites orbiting earth.

That wasn't enough, however, for the tech's developer Alexandre Pechev, who wanted to "expand the horizons" of his creation beyond the final frontier. And so he identified games development as a place where what became IKinema would better thrive. Admit it, it feels pretty cool to be in the industry to which man's journey to the stars plays mere technological stepping stone.

In all seriousness, IKinema offers an intriguing new tool for animators, enabling full-body solving during gameplay that is applicable to all creatures.

CREATURE COMFORTS

"IKinema has three main elements that make it quite unique," explains IKinema CEO Pechev. "The first one is that it produces very organic and natural body behaviour in run-time. It can animate any creature, from a dragon to a spider, or from a human to a tree, or anything that an artist can design and put a mesh and bone structure inside."

The tool, designed to be user-friendly, and currently available as middleware in its own right or as a plug in for tools including Maya and Trinigy Engine, also incorporates balance, gravity and force into the solving; something its creators believe makes it quite unique. With more engine integrations and offline versions expected, IKinema hopes to be a prolific tool in the coming months.

"It doesn't replace the current animation engines, so it is not an animation engine itself," continues Pechev. "It is a customisation or add-on to those engines. It provides a way – in the pipeline – to fully customise your creature to the scene, taking on the relationship with physics."

> ***"It produces very organic and natural body behaviour in run-time. It can animate any creature, from a dragon to a spider, or from a human to a tree."***
>
> Alexandre Pechev, IKinema

"It is also very fast, and very compact, and is the same tool you can have in your pipeline, and design games from iPhone to web and PS3," adds the CEO. "It's the same API, the same way of handling everything. You don't have to change anything."

STAY ON RE-TARGET

Retargeting is also one of IKinema's most powerful features, meaning the tool can blend joint data from stored animation or mocap to automatically adapt creature movement in run-time. Such functionality gives this relatively new technology a fighting chance in the increasingly competitive world of animation middleware.

Primed for Kinect and Move, and rapidly moving to embrace new forms of mobile and web gaming, IKinema is fast becoming a name to watch.

Bright Ideas

As an organisation with roots in the space exploration sector, IKinema is not a afraid of big ideas. In fact, its ambition is what sets the Guildford-based apart.

"The challenge in establishing IKinema has come from not originating in the gaming sector," admits its frank CEO Alexandre Pechev.

"We have honestly taken our time to adapt and understand.

"But at the same time, when you are a newcomer, you start thinking in very new ways. You don't necessarily make incremental steps with your ideas, and you try to penetrate with what existing companies might see as really quite new, and even perhaps a bit exotic."

Spend more time with Pechev and you'll hear about the impressive range of notions he and his team want to develop at the core of IKinema, such as generating walking autonomously in a scene. There's even talk of shaking up the ecosystem of the related industries, and ideas like introducing consumer animated avatars into SMS technology abound.

IKinema isn't afraid to say it wants to change the world of animation from the bottom up, and it is confident it can do just that. With such a bold attitude, perhaps it really can.

EPIC DIARIES

Ninja Theory uses Unreal Engine 3 to double down on creativity

ENSLAVED
DEVELOPER: Ninja Theory
RELEASED: October 8th 2010
www.ninjatheory.com
Built using Unreal Engine 3 www.unrealtechnology.com

Above: Mike Ball and Tameem Antoniades, Ninja Theory co-founders

COMING OFF the success of their critically acclaimed PlayStation 3 action game, *Heavenly Sword*, the developers at Ninja Theory had a slightly different plan in mind for their next adventure.

"With *Heavenly Sword*, we had developed the engine and toolset entirely ourselves," says Mike Ball, co-founder and chief technical officer. "That required a large amount of resources, and it would take just as much effort to update the technology, improve the toolset and add the new features we needed for our next game."

Once Ninja Theory decided to go multi-platform with the new game, *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*, it made the move to Unreal Engine 3. This time around, Ninja Theory had 80 people on hand for the production period, and would be able to use all that talent to focus on creativity rather than engine technology.

GO WEST

"Unreal Engine 3 allowed us to start iterating on the gameplay much more quickly," Ball says. "We needed to maximise our production time by making sure the team's workflow was effective, and UE3 was the right choice to do that."

Using UE3, Ninja Theory was able to improve on many of the lessons they learned with their previous game. "We wanted an engine that was truly focused on getting the most out of designers and artists," explains Ball. "Despite the awesome results we achieved with *Heavenly Sword*, that was really the weak point of our own engine. It just didn't scale."

Ninja Theory also wanted to improve on the total length of gameplay with *Enslaved*, which is where Unreal Kismet came into play. Ninja Theory's designers used Kismet's visual scripting tools to build much larger play environments for players to explore. Kismet also enabled the team to create a wider variety of gameplay across the greater game length, which Ball says is ultimately the key to keeping the player attached to the story.

Ninja Theory has built a reputation for creating beautiful environments – an ability that would be put to the test with *Enslaved*. Based on a 400-year-old Chinese novel called *Journey to the West* – which is itself based on much older folklore – *Enslaved* brings this ancient story to a future New York City.

To do justice to this rich source material while bringing it to life in a hyper-modern environment, the Ninja Theory team knew it needed to push its graphics capabilities as far as they could go. Ball says that UE3 gave the artists much more control, and with its advanced production tools the team was able to pack detail into their environments.

NEW YORK STORIES

"This was really important for the portrayal of the New York we wanted to build," says Ball. "Through elements of the environment, we wanted the player to experience the story of people in the past, caught in destruction and trying desperately to escape. Giving the art team control over shaders and post-processing chains allowed us to set up some beautiful scenes that contrasted well with the scenes of destruction."

Ninja Theory also built on top of UE3's advanced combat capabilities. "We did a lot of experimenting with the camera to make every hit feel like it counts and draw you into the drama of combat," said Tameem Antoniades, Ninja Theory co-founder and chief design officer. "We used close-up shots during takedowns and finishing moves to really show the emotional impact combat has on Monkey, the main character. It's more of a cinematic twist on combat mechanics."

Along the way, the Ninja Theory team was able to connect with other Unreal licensees through the Unreal Developer Network. In fact, Ball says that the extensive community support has been a strong point of working with UE3. Other developers were always happy to help with tough questions, and Ball recalls lots of occasions where a technical query was answered by a studio on the other side of the world before anyone else even touched it.

The result? One of the freshest, most beautiful games of 2010, boasting longer, more intense gameplay than any of Ninja Theory's previous games. The post-apocalyptic future is looking bright for Ninja Theory from here.

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

Dubai World Game Expo
Dubai, UAE
November 29th – December 1st, 2010

DICE Summit
Las Vegas
February 9th – 11th, 2011

GDC
San Francisco
February 28th – March 4th, 2011

Please email: ***mrein@epicgames.com*** *for appointments.*

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

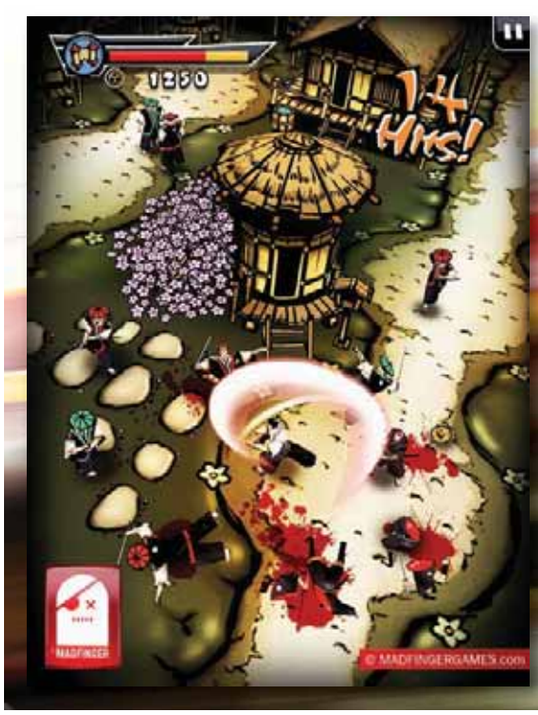
FOR RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES PLEASE VISIT:
www.epicgames.com/epic_jobs.html

Canadian-born **Mark Rein** is vice president and co-founder of Epic Games based in Cary, North Carolina. Epic's Unreal Engine 3 has won Game Developer magazine's Best Engine Front Line Award four times along with entry into the Hall of Fame. UE3 has won three consecutive Develop Industry Excellence Awards. Epic is the creator of the mega-hit Unreal series of games and the blockbuster Gears of War franchise. Follow @MarkRein on Twitter.

UNITY FOCUS

Madfinger Games' co-founder **Marek Rabas** discusses Samurai II: Vengeance

WAY OF THE SAMURAI
DEVELOPER: Madfinger Games
RELEASE DATE: October 21st 2010
PLATFORM: iOS
www.madfingergames.com/games



Madfinger's use of drawing gestures produces a unique gaming experience

ALL OF the staff at Madfinger Games are industry veterans of ten years or more. We used to work on PC and console games like *Hidden and Dangerous II*, *Mafia*, *Mafia II*, *Vietcong 2*, *Rush and Attack*, and *Silent Hill 8*.

We really enjoyed working on these titles, but wanted to work on our own games. So when the iPhone started to gain traction as a gaming device, we saw a great opportunity to found a studio of our own.

In 2009 we started Madfinger Games with myself as programmer and Pavel Čížek as the studio artist.

Our experience from 'big' games taught us that you need perfect tools for developing; not just super-fast rendering capabilities. Developing our own technology wasn't an option, so we were looking for technology that already implemented all the base things like renderer, animation, audio, and so on, but also featured polished tools. In 2009 only a few engines supported iPhone and even less had sophisticated tools. After a few tests we decided go with Unity 3D. It was an easy and really great choice and all our games now use Unity 3D.

FROM SMALL ACORNS

Initially we created a small game called 15 Blocks Puzzle for testing purposes. We finished it in a few weeks, working with the Unity engine was really a pleasure for us. At this point we all still had day jobs and were working on Madfinger Games in our spare time. Even though we knew the game wouldn't be a huge hit, we were still disappointed to sell only 150 copies worldwide in the first month.

As fans of *God of War* and *Ninja Gaiden* we wanted to create a good hack-and-slash game and were really excited by the iPhone's touch screen. After some trial and error we came up with the idea for *Samurai: Way of the Warrior* and drawing gestures on the screen. At this point Tomáš Šlápota and Michal Babjár came aboard to handle the music and art respectively.

The final game looks beautiful on the iPhone 3G and we really like our gesture control scheme and cell-shading technology.

The good thing was that people began to talk about us, we got really good contacts with journalists, and were invited to the Unity Technologies beta program. We won several awards and found an investor in 2010.

> ***"The other this we're pursuing is publishing. We want to help other indie studios with polishing and publishing their games. We know how hard it is."***

Thanks to our new investor, we could start making games in earnest. We set up the official company, left our jobs and started working full time on Madfinger Games.

When we started developing *Samurai II: Vengeance*, our code base from *Samurai I* was in really bad shape and hard to work with. We decided to start from scratch and in two months we switched to the Unity 3 beta. We wanted to develop a new code base for our next several games to save money and development time.

Unity 3 is really a step ahead and working with the Unity support team was a pleasure.

New beta versions came out fast and they even helped us debug some nasty issues in the final game.

LOOKING AHEAD

We are now busy developing two casual games and porting *Samurai II* to Android. Unity 3D has become a great multi-platform technology and we are able to create ports in a matter of days.

The other thing we're pursuing is publishing. We want to help other indie studios with polishing and publishing their games. We know how hard it is to finish game and sell it.

We are not looking for outsourcing or co-development on games, but we can polish their textures, animations, sounds, music, and so on. We hope that this unique approach to publishing will deliver some really good games to players.

HEARD ABOUT

John Broomhall talks to Blood Stone's audio team about the 007 sound

JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE
DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations
RELEASE DATE: November 5th, 2010
PLATFORM: Xbox 360, PS3, PC
www.bloodstonegame.com

Blood Stone foley sessions took place at Todd AO in LA

Orchestral recording took place at London's Abbey Road Studio

FOR CRITICALLY acclaimed game developer Bizarre Creations and award-winning composer Richard Jacques, the latest *Bond* story presented an opportunity to work on one of the biggest franchises on the planet.

For Jacques, the challenges were technical and logistical. Creatively confident, he was nevertheless concerned as to how classic Bond music could be delivered 'interactively'.

"Music is a major component of the storytelling and characterisation of *Bond*," explains Jacques. "In a *Bond* film you'll get lovely swells and crescendos marking high-point moments – but reproducing that on-the-fly in a video game in response to unpredictable interactive input is a big ask.

"The project was massive – two-hours and twenty minutes of score as well as a ton of interactive variations. Many cues have up to five alternative versions which means up to five ProTools sessions per cue with a track-count of 192 not being untypical."

Said Jacques: "Ensuring every alt mix sounds compatible with its neighbours with all the right dynamics and mastering levels can be quite tricky – you need a good pair of ears. Then you have to create implementation mock-ups in ProTools to demonstrate how it's works in-game. Overall, the title entailed about a year's worth of effort for me, not to mention the recording, mixing and game implementation folks."

WEAPONS OF CHOICE

For Grunwaldt, the key sound design challenge was combat. Weapon sounds were outsourced to Chuck Russom, who'd taken a similar role on a previous *Bond* game. Over a six-week period he worked remotely from the team, making deliveries online. Meanwhile, Grunwaldt attended foley sessions at Todd AO in Los Angeles.

"We knew hand-to-hand combat would be a main game feature so we went to the experts," confirms Grunwaldt.

"These guys are awesome at creating all the punching and whooshing sounds. They provided us lots of great source material to edit and apply to video renders of the eighty-

> ***"In a Bond film you'll get lovely swells and crescendos marking high-point moments – but reproducing that on-the-fly in a video game is a big ask."***
>
> Richard Jacques, Composer

plus set-piece 'take-down' animations. These days everyone seems to be talking about making game audio systems more generative but we soon found dubbing all the animations individually was much better for the title. A custom approach meant so much more satisfying detail."

At this stage, Grunwaldt and Jacques looked at mechanics for music delivery to enhance the combat experience, further building anticipation by, for instance, having strings fading up prior to a punch.

"The problem was doing it in a non-linear environment," says Grunwaldt. "We settled on this distance-based mechanic. As you wait in cover and the enemy's moving towards you, we trigger the strings at a certain proximity and crescendo them as they get close. Then we'll play a percussive sting when you make your move giving a nice release of tension.

"If you then engage in full-on combat, the music will transition to a full-on fighting cue with percussion and *Bond*-style brass – it really works very well."

WELL COMPOSED

"It's a very interactive score," adds Jacques. "Given the nature of the music style and content, these variants need re-composing and re-orchestrating so each one is musically complete in terms of arrangement – but they all still sound of the same family. This means when I'm composing and orchestrating, I'm not just thinking in terms of start to end through-composition, but also I'm considering the music top-down, in terms of intensity. I might have five or six sessions in Logic and lots of colour coding and different mix groups to keep track of it all. The musical key relationships are also very important – making sure everything flows nicely from initial menus screens to end credits. I took all that very seriously, working out a chart of the narrative flow and gameplay intensity."

Working from his own studio, Jacques composed and recorded high-end mock-ups of every cue and its associated variations, providing rough mixes to the team to be used as the point of reference for sign-off. Orchestral recording subsequently took place in London's Abbey Road and the soundtrack features around 95 musicians, some of whom have played on every Bond film to date.

Jacques concludes: "The musicians were brilliant. The project was a dream, but now I can hopefully have the odd weekend off."

Above: composer Richard Jacques and lead audio designer Mathias Grunwaldt

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www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

World of **GUI**

When it comes to game user interfaces, a picture paints a thousand words. That considered, Scaleform's gaming products specialist **Matthew Doyle** has hand picked a quartet of images that show GUI at its best…

Halo Reach

Our favourite aspect of the game's UI was the main menu and sub-menus. The neat, open layout enables easy navigation and top-notch integration of social features, specifically detailed information about friends currently playing Halo.

The latest incarnation of Bungie's prized IP Halo sticks to its successful design and gameplay formula. The futuristic, clean and at times stark design transfers well to the UI, providing simple, clear layouts that are exceptionally intuitive.

The game's HUD is also impressive, following the 'less is more' motto with a minimalist design that doesn't interfere with gameplay yet is highly functional.

StarCraft II

The opening menus of Starcraft II have a larger-than-life feel to them, in both audio and artistic design, which we really liked.

Blizzard successfully created the de-facto RTS UI template with its 1998 release of StarCraft, and it has only improved since then.

Access to Battle.net and other online features was well presented enabling players to take advantage of its functionality.

Communication videos within the HUD elements keep the menus animated and interesting. Hot key functionality is top-notch enabling quick and precise interface with the game.

In game, the UI presentation is well organised and, while abundant, does not detract from gameplay.

Matthew Doyle, gaming products specialist at Scaleform, has been responsible for creating tutorial videos and documents designed to aid users of the company's UI solution since 2006. He has been a speaker for the company at GDC in 2009 and 2010 and has eight years of game development experience prior to joining Scaleform in positions ranging from 3D environment artist to senior gameplay designer for Midway games. **www.scaleform.com**

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Massively Multiplayer Lessons

Gary Gattis, CEO of Spacetime Studios, offers some insight into the lessons learned as his team created the ambitious mobile MMO Pocket Legends

Above: Spacetime Studios CEO Gary Gattis

SPACETIME STUDIOS came into existence in 2005. Our charter was to create a large-scale, science fiction MMO called *Blackstar*. We had built and run MMOs together before, most recently *Star Wars: Galaxies*, but this was the first company we had started on our own.

Blackstar was a very ambitious from the start. The goal was to have a projectile-based ground and space-flight shooter where combat could occur between the two avatar-types and environments. The game needed to scale to very large populations and run on low-end machines. To top it all off, the bar for the visual direction was through the roof. Bottom line, it had to play and look great.

The team had all worked on live titles before – when a MMO is running 24/7 – and gotten the panicked call at 3:30am that all-clusters-are-down-and-we-are-losing-money-and-we-need-to-get-things-back-online-now! We had all experienced the challenge of updating content and potentially causing drastic and unintended side effects. We had all crunched on projects because someone did not plan properly and maybe throwing bodies at the problem would solve it. This time we vowed to do it differently.

ENGINES ON

A fundamental business strategy of ours was to build and own our technology. Our designers and artists came up with an extensive list of toolsets and workflow requirements, and our engineers coded an extremely powerful client-server architecture and editor. We created a way to mass-produce very sophisticated content in a stable production environment. We called it the Spacetime Engine.

> ***Blackstar went through pre-production without a hitch. The Spacetime Engine performed flawlessly, handling everything we threw at it.***
>
> Gary Gattis, Spacetime Studios

Blackstar went through pre-production without a hitch. We instituted a no-crunch policy and stuck by it. The Spacetime Engine performed flawlessly, handling everything we threw at it and more.

In spite of this, our original publisher, who just shipped two projects that performed poorly, decided to mitigate their risk of North American development and cancelled *Blackstar*. We parted on good terms but we were completely devastated.

We believed in *Blackstar* and our team. Instead of laying everyone off, we shopped it around to just about every publisher on the planet, and the result was always the same. The game was beautiful, and it sure looked fun, but what really got their attention was the way that we did things and the engine we had built. As the dust slowly settled, we realised that we had a lot of potential value in our skills and our technology.

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

One day, as the partners were driving to the airport to pitch yet-another-game, we realised we were all playing on our iPhones, by ourselves. Why couldn't we be playing together? No one had done it before, but that did not mean that it could not be done. The devices were powerful enough. They were all connected. People were used to conducting micro-transactions. We perceived these three factors as a perfect storm in the making, and that single moment planted the seed that grew into *Pocket Legends*.

We were unsure of the logistics of iPhone development, so we formed a research and development division called ClockRocket Games. We rapidly created seven games to

LESSONS LEARNED

■ WHAT WENT WRONG:

We were too flexible with our original publisher.

The scope of *Blackstar* grew and grew because of the publisher's desire to produce a *WoW*-killer (didn't everyone want a *WoW*-killer?). Our tech and pipelines could handle it, so in that we were always in agreement with them.

We hung on to a large team for far too long. After *Blackstar* went away, we still had a large development team. We were working with some of the most talented people in the world, and we did not want to let them go.

■ WHAT WENT RIGHT:

We built a very powerful technological foundation. This is the third MMO engine that our team has worked on. We knew where other engines fell short, we knew what we needed from a production environment, and we decided that this would be the cornerstone of our company.

We grew our technology by applying it to a number of different projects. As the company evolved, our tech grew with us.

We mitigated our risks for moving onto a new platform. Spacetime Studios had always been about large-scale, premium MMO development. That is our skill set and that is what we built our tools for.

We built loyalty and trust with our employees and ourselves. It may have been a business mistake to carry a fully-loaded team without a project, but we did reap other benefits during that time. We gave our hearts and minds to the effort.

In the end, these things are what allowed us to take a huge leap of faith, put it all on the line, and see what we could do together.

■ CLOSING THOUGHTS:

Build value any way you can. The ultimate caution for developers is to be careful when negotiating your deals with publishers.

Hang in there. Keep on hanging in there. We were crushed when *Blackstar* was cancelled. The easy route would have been to dissolve the studio, clear out the bank account, and all go on our way to start anew somewhere else.

Crunch is not necessary. People need to be happy at home to be happy at work. Crunch would not have saved *Blackstar*. Crunch would not have stopped our contract work from going away.

When opportunity knocks, kick down the damn door. There was no reason to believe that a mobile MMO would succeed. Several people actually told us it would never work.

explore the development and publishing pipelines, producing such critically acclaimed classics as *Shotgun Granny*, *Zombie Weatherman*, *Dreadmill* and *Deadshot*.

The ClockRocket suite of games explored several core aspects of our technology and development processes. Within a couple of months we determined that the fundamental systems from our engine worked on the iPhone. We could use our tools and pipelines to build and operate games on mobile devices. We had started to convince ourselves that we had the means to do something that no one else had done before. We had a strong belief that a 3D mobile MMO was the next killer app, and we decided that we were all in.

Development went quick because of the tools and techniques that we had available to us at the time. Inside of just a month we had a very fun little multiplayer action game to play. Two months into the project we had enough of a prototype to open it up to a small user-base.

> ***"We convinced ourselves that we had the means to do something no one else had done before. We believed a 3D mobile MMO was the next killer app."***
>
> Gary Gattis, Spacetime Studios

We were excited to get wind of the iPad in month four. *Pocket Legends* looked good on the phone but a lot of graphical sacrifices were made to play at that resolution. The iPad development kit was very similar to the iPhone, and we immediately ported the game to the larger device. *Pocket Legends* really blossomed on the bigger screen. It looked amazing and played like a dream. We wrapped up the core features, held our breaths and hoped for the best.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

Pocket Legends was released alongside the iPad on April 3rd, 2010. A version for the rest of the iOS devices launched the next week. Since then, we have updated the content dozens of times, adding hundreds of hours of gameplay. We have had four client updates, adding major features including open-world navigation, leaderboards, character customisations, quests, PvP, secure trade, friends, gifting, and trial accounts. We have done all of this in four months thanks hugely to the amazing flexibility and power of the Spacetime Engine.

We feel our investment into *Pocket Legends* is a success. We have a unique product on iOS, and we are currently porting it to Android and the PC. We are on our way to having a full-scale, 3D action MMO on multiple platforms where everyone plays together in a shared space.

Right now we are assessing where we are and what opportunities exist. We will continue to support, refine, and expand *Pocket Legends*. We may spin out multiple products and licence the engine. It is a very exciting time for us and we feel extremely fortunate to be here.

Talking Fable III

Charged with capturing the best voice over audio for Fable III, Side had to work to get the best from a number of world famous actors. Production manager **Sini Downing** takes us through the process from casting to post…

Above: Side production manager Sini Downing

FOLLOWING A successful collaboration on *Fable II*, Side was delighted to be working once again with Lionhead on the third installment of the series.

Brought on board for casting, directing, recording and post of all 470,000 scripted words spoken by almost 200 characters, we knew it was going be another wild ride. Amongst those returning were lead voice director Kate Saxon, Lionhead's tireless audio producer Georg Backer and myself as production manager.

"With *Fable III*, we wanted to build on the success of *Fable II* and take it further; make the player feel part of Albion and care about the world, its characters and story," explains Backer. "We knew that working with the right people from early on – and making them an important part of our creative process was vital to accomplish our vision."

We began back in March 2009 with a pre-production meeting. Side's creative director Andy Emery met with the Lionhead team to discuss scheduling, budget, key lessons learnt from *Fable II*'s VO production and early thoughts on casting.

Lionhead put together their casting group, including Backer, lead writer Mark Llabres Hill, lead designer Josh Atkins, and lead scripter Alex Skidmore. For each lead character they came up with a list of actors and/or characters from films that had some quality they wanted. From that Side's casting team began putting together a long list for the potential high profile cast. Our casting mantra is to make sure that the performance a well-known actor, regardless of their profile, can bring to a specific character is the right one, and this philosophy meshed well with the way Lionhead approached their potential cast as well.

CASTING A SPELL

"Our casting decisions were made to ensure we have the best cast for the characters. It wasn't a marketing thing," Backer confirms.

The long list was narrowed to a short list, with input from Kate Saxon and a final meeting with Peter Molyneux. The cast contained some rather marketing-friendly names, including Sir Ben Kingsley, John Cleese and Simon Pegg, actors who provided wonderful performances as well as gaining a bit of pre-release attention. No one said you can't have great performances and press.

> ***"With Fable III, we wanted to build on the success of Fable II and take it further; make the player feel part of Albion and care about the world."***
>
> Georg Backer, Lionhead

But back in the summer of 2009, we were far from welcoming any Hollywood stars into the studio. August saw Saxon working on staging sessions with the Lionhead team as the performance/drama director and consultant. The sessions involved actors physically performing scenes which would become core quest scenes in the game.

When I'd been preparing to approach agents of the high profile actors I knew that some wouldn't have had offers from a video game before. Part of my job is to help agents understand game projects, which is especially important when approaching the caliber of actor we were going for.

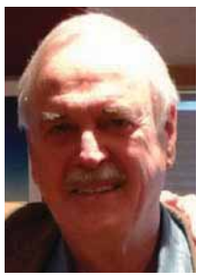
Side worked with Lionhead to create an attractive pitch package. This included a story overview, character biographies, an art book with some lovely early conceptual drawings of characters, costumes and landscapes, and reviews of the previous games from mainstream press. After many calls, emails and negotiation, all the high profile and lead cast were finally on board.

Casting for supporting characters began in November with a mix of auditions and clips from our extensive actor database. As Side has recorded the *Fable* series, casting was well-versed in the mix required, with characters ranging from comic to country, vulnerable to downright nasty. We began recording in December 2009, starting mainly with AI characters. During this time we also began testing actors for the Auroran accent. This required fully directed auditions as there weren't voice clips for what we needed.

SPEAK UP

Aurora was a new land in Fable and with a newly–created land comes a new accent. It's always fun to cast, and try to explain to

Side



Above: Fable III vocie actors Simon Pegg, Bernard Hill, Stephen Fry and John Cleese

actors, what a made-up accent should sound like. How do you cast for a native accent when the country doesn't exist? It was very much a case of 'we'll know it when we hear it' and we wandered through a number of desert regions before finally landing on ideal male and female versions of the accent which were then used as guides for the other Aurorans added to the cast.

With the New Year came the main recording sessions. We began in January 2010 with the core quest recordings, with Saxon at the helm. Backer was always on hand with game builds, character and location images and generally there as support for her.

Also present was either Llabres Hill or another of the writing team, Rich Byrant, answering questions on plot, character, and context. "There was deep collaboration," Georg says, "we wanted to give our best to get the best quality possible and to be able to respond to feedback as soon as possible."

With such a massive script, systems were put into place early on to ensure that everyone was literally on the same page. Lionhead provided a dedicated database system for the production, which was in-house with us but could be remotely updated by the Lionhead team, giving us the most current scripts at any given time. The system helped us create recording scripts and track changes made during sessions, which was also useful for post-production. The only disadvantage was that the writing team found they could sneak new lines in at the very last minute. We soon had to put a stop to that with a cut-off time the day before recording. At some point there has to be a final script which can be sent to actors and given to directors.

The majority of quest recording sessions were recorded with individual actors, due to both the amount to be recorded and actor availability. To ensure a natural delivery of the dialogue between characters, we set up a system to quickly export selected takes into a 'bin' from which the director could then trigger feeder lines from the script. This enabled the actors to perform off of each other's lines.

> ***"Watching animations of the characters, the actors and I would come up with different sounds and lines. It was different to say the least."***
>
> Phil Evans, Lionhead

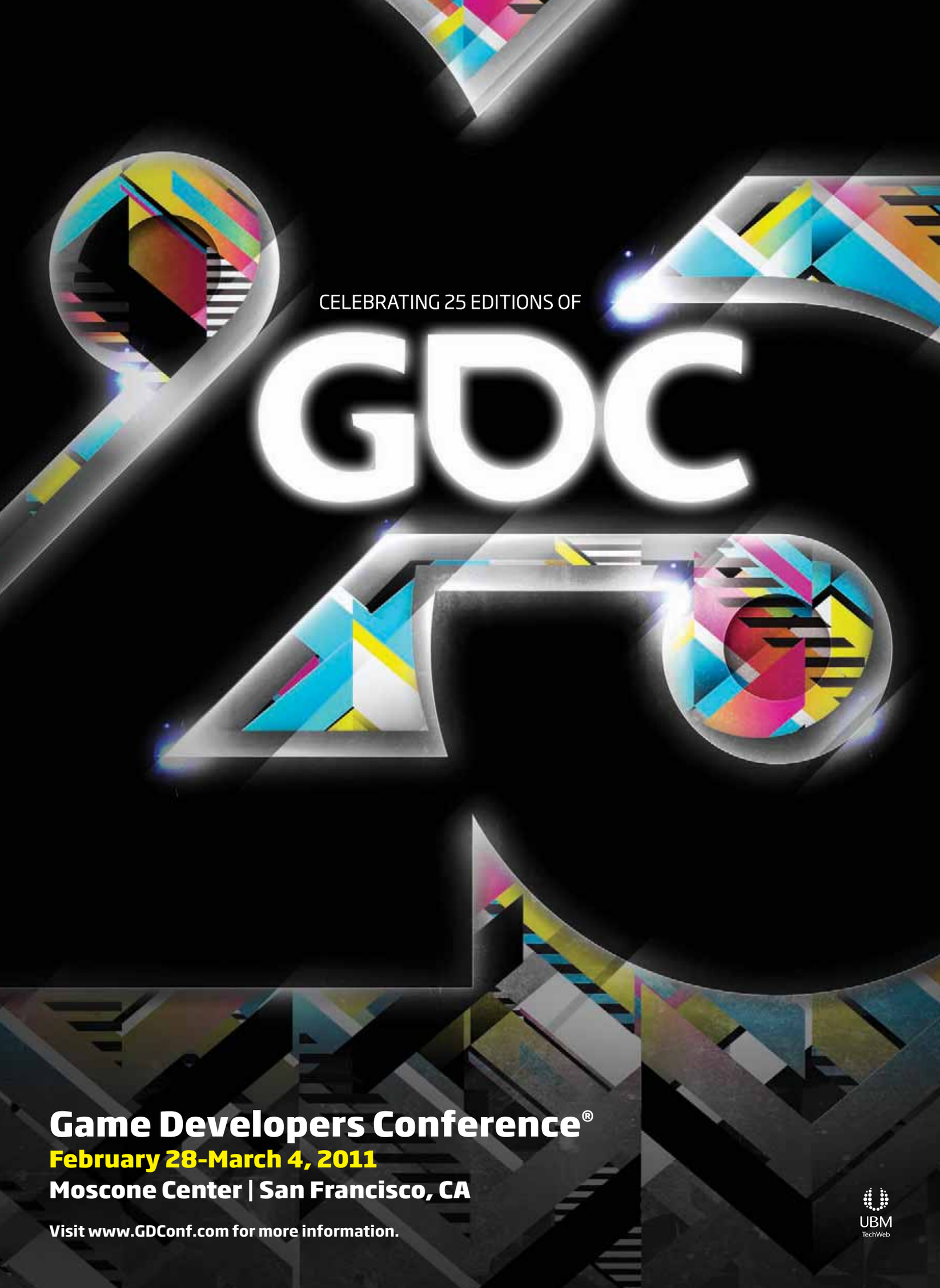
WELL SAID

As the quest recordings continued, AI sessions began in a second studio in February. Additional voice directors ran the AI sessions, with a dedicated director just for the kids. This meant that we had two studios recording on *Fable* concurrently. Those familiar with the *Fable* style know there is a distinctive difference between the core quest and the AI in the world. While the quest studio might be dealing with passion, hatred, love, loss and general hero-in-the-making emotions, the AI had comedy, family life, shop keeping and an unusual amount of laughing, dancing, patty-caking and, yes, passing wind.

"Once we'd finished the scripted AI lines we'd go on to the expressions which were all ad-libbed. Watching animations of the characters doing all sorts of actions and interacting with the hero, the actors and I would come up with different sounds and off-the-cuff lines. It was a different aspect to the recording to say the least," explained AI director Phil Evans.

Pickups were recorded in April and May 2010. The game builds were used here as well, with Saxon and Backer playing the key scenes to the actors, allowing the performers to hear their lines implemented. As any developer knows, seeing a near-complete cut scene can be extremely helpful and it was great to see the actors so enthusiastic about how their performances were being integrated within the graphics, music, interactivity and the entirety of the Fable world being built.

Recording finally wrapped on June 4th 2010, bringing to a close months of continual work. "*Fable III* was fulfilling, challenging and creative to work on," Saxon reflects. "I had a dream cast to work with and these lead performances were supported by talented actors who together filled the *Fable* landscape with vivacity and colour."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DEAD END THRILLS

Continuing his ongoing series looking at the best of game art via specially-captured in-game images, **Duncan Harris** turns his attention to Ninja Theory's ambitious hack 'n' slash Enslaved...

Enslaved

"The idea of this village square was to create a scene of contrast," explains Alex 'Talexi' Taini, visual art director at Team Ninja.

"The colours and decoration don't reflect the reality of the outside world, which is that very few humans have survived. We wanted this area to have a strong sense of community, a community that has pulled together in desperate and dark times to create something that can be enjoyed by everyone. The coloured walls around the square are inspired by Gaudi's sculptures and the coloured flags are reminiscent of community celebrations. When you arrive at this location in the game you are filled with hope and have expectations of life and happiness, but instead you find something quite different."

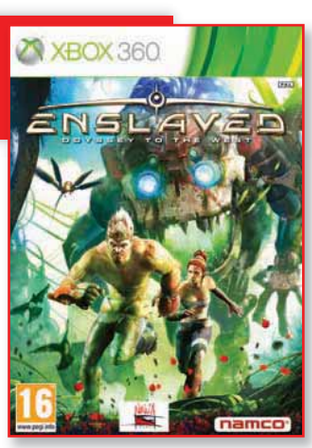
Players of Team Ninja's cinematic platformer will have felt something similar, if perhaps the opposite: filled with expectations of drab 'destroyed beauty', instead they found something splendorous, enigmatic and restless in location and tone. The first commercial game to really showcase Unreal's new Lightmass global illumination is begging for release on PC.

Tools and tricks for this screenshot: preview code of *Enslaved* edited via an Xbox 360 test kit to restore various Unreal Engine camera, HUD, timescale and screenshot commands. Controller bindings were reassigned and stacked to combine gameplay and debug controls. Images were captured at 5760x3240px before being downsampled on PC to 1080p.

www.deadendthrills.com

Dead End Thrills is a website and resource dedicated to the art of video games. Its galleries feature over 5,500 lovingly taken, watermark-free screenshots which are free to download and use. Elsewhere, it features interviews with today's leading artists and designers.

Developer: Ninja Theory
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Released: 2010
Capture format: 360



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New senior production expert at Hansoft
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Studio News

This month: hirings at THQ, Rare, Lightning Fish and Rovio

THQ has poached Patrice Désilets for its newly opened studio in Montréal, Canada.

The decorated game designer, who shot to fame as creative director on the hugely successful *Assassin's Creed* franchise, as well as the Prince of Persia reboot, will begin working at THQ's Montréal studio next summer.

He will be building new IP for the group, THQ said.

Désilets left Ubisoft Montreal, unexpectedly, earlier in the year after working on the latest Assassin's Creed follow-up.

In June Ubisoft said Désilets "decided to take a creative break from the industry" – a claim which suggests his move to THQ had come as a surprise for his former employer.

"The best way we can deliver fresh, high-quality gaming experiences is by working with the best talent. THQ is delighted to have the opportunity to make a brilliant addition to our team next year with Patrice Désilets," said Danny Bilson, THQ's core games executive vice president.

"We expect calendar 2011 to be a watershed year for THQ, and adding developers like Patrice helps ensure our focus on new IP and great games charted by leading industry artists."

www.thq.com

Long-standing Microsoft exec Scott Henson has become the new studio manager of UK studio **Rare**.

Henson boasts 16 years experience with Microsoft, having been a central figure in the development of the hardware and software of the Xbox, Xbox Live, Xbox 360 and Kinect. He now wants Rare to lead the way in all future motion gaming innovation and developments.

"The reason I'm so excited is that both Rare and I has a great history of innovation and creating experiences that are breakthrough experiences that reach millions of people," Henson told our sister magazine *MCV*.

"The timing is actually perfect. I've worked on Xbox since before the original Xbox. I helped bring Xbox Live to life, which has reached millions of people. Rare over the last 25 years is the same story.

"It's all those things coming together at a time when Kinect is about to launch with an excellent launch title in Kinect Sports which is poised to do very, very well. I think the combination is extremely powerful."

www.rareware.com

Banbury-based studio **Lightning Fish** has expanded its development team with the hiring of André van Rooijen and Bruce Nesbit as art director and senior programmer respectively.

Boasting 12 years of industry experience, van Rooijen cited Lightning Fish's work with motion control tech as reason for his move to the firm.

"Having been closely involved with the camera and motion based games Playlogic created for the Eye Toy Group of Sony Studio London; Lightning Fish turned out to be an excellent match," he said.

"At Lightning Fish I will contribute to their upcoming titles as well as help with expanding the art team so it is able to meet the demands of the ambitious projects that are planned for the future."

Nesbit, who has programming experience of over 25 years, will now be maintaining the toolchain and coding work on Lightning Fish titles.

www.lightningfishgames.com

Rovio, the Finnish casual games developer behind hit game *Angry Birds*, is seeking to grow its workforce significantly.

According to Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, the studio is looking to hire 14 new staff immediately, and has forecast a studio headcount of over 100 from the current 31 in the near future.

On the subject of the recent sale of *Angry Birds* publisher Chillingo to EA, a Rovio spokesperson categorically outlined the company position on the future of the company and it's IP.

"We have not sold out. We have not sold to EA. We are Rovio. We own *Angry Birds*," they said.

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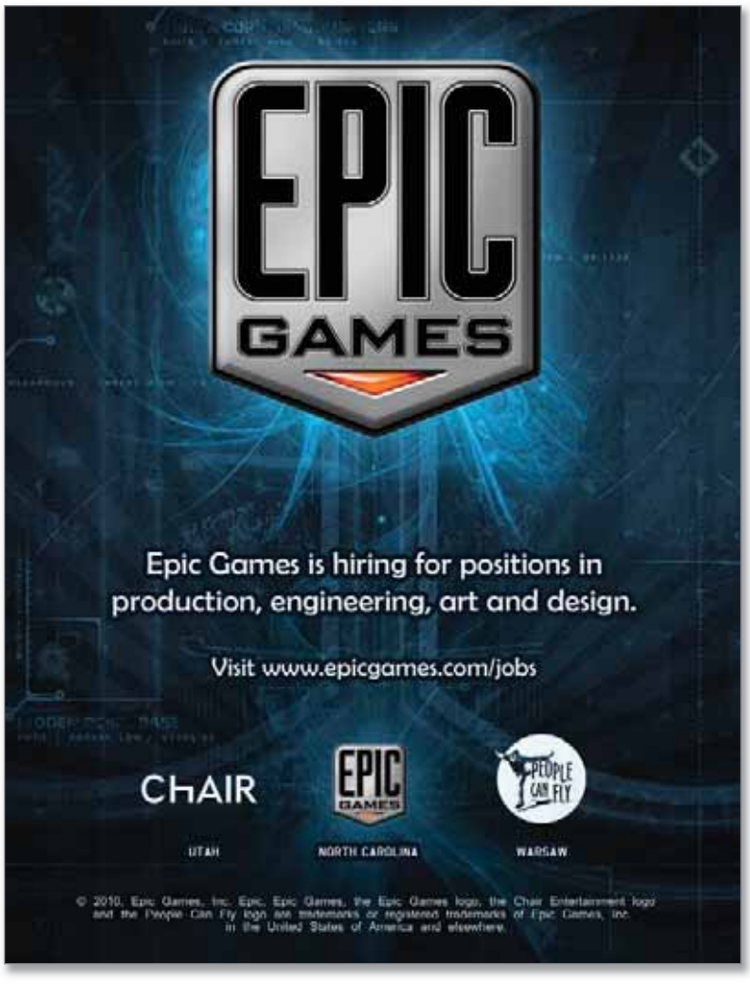
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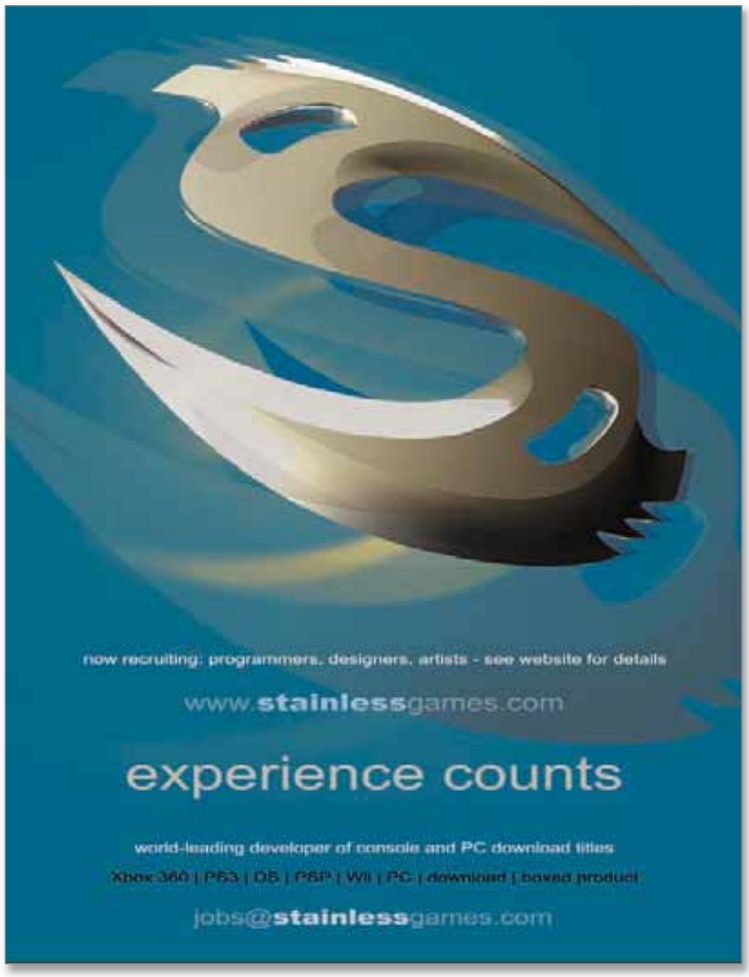
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Studio Spotlight

GUERRILLA GAMES

Founded in 2000, Netherlands-based Guerrilla was the result of a merger between between several Dutch studios including Orange Games and Digital Infinity. In the early days, the firm was a subsidiary of the larger Dutch media conglomerate Lost Boys, known as Lost Boys Games. Between its founding and 2003, the studio released four titles for the Game Boy Advance and Game Boy Color.

Later that year, the development portion of Lost Boys was sold off to Media Republic and renamed Guerrilla Games. It was at this point that the studio began work on two titles that would launch it onto a far wider stage of recognition. *Killzone*, the sci-fi FPS for Sony Computer Entertainment and *Shellshock: Nam '67*, a second FPS for Eidos Interactive.

Killzone in particular was a massive success, dubbed '*Halo* Killer' by games media and consumers alike, it sold over a million copies worldwide and went Platinum in both North America and Europe. *Shellshock* was also thought to have sold close to 900,000 copies.

Following this, in 2004 Guerrilla signed an exclusive development agreement with SCE that tied its future development to Sony console-based titles alone.

This deal was significantly expanded upon in 2005, when Sony acquired Guerrilla from Media Republic. Guerrilla became a wholly owned first-party studio within the publishing giant.

In 2006, Guerrilla released *Killzone: Liberation* for the PlayStation Portable. This game met with a massively positive critical response, being hailed by some as the best shooting game available on the PSP.

Following on from *Liberation*, *Killzone 2* was released in early 2009, and shifted a million units in three months. Critically the game was again lauded, ranking up to a Metacritic score of 91. The highest levels of praise were given to the title's graphics and gameplay, increasing Guerrilla's already weighty development reputation considering its age and corresponding level of output.

Currently, Guerrilla is working on the third installment in the *Killzone* franchise, set for a February 2011 release. The studio employs 150 developers of 20 different nationalities, and is currently hiring once again for senior positions across the development skillsets.

The story of Guerrilla has, to date, been one of rapid growth and success. The studio, coming in at only 10 years old, is responsible for one of the biggest FPS franchises on the planet. It isn't showing any signs of slowing down either. Expectation for *Killzone 3* is high, but with Guerrilla the David and Goliath story is becoming all part of the routine.

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Tools News

This month: Trinigy, Havok, Sundog Software, Autodesk and Swadesh Animation

Game engine vendor **Trinigy** will now fully integrate the FMOD Audio Suite within its Vision Engine 8, following a joint initiative begun between both itself and FMOD owner Firelight.

By the end of the project, Trinigy hopes that Firelight's FMOD Ex suite of cross-platform audio tools can be directly accessed via Vision Engine's SDK.

On completion, the partnership will come with a new offer – free FMOD tools for Vision Engine licensees.

"We have successfully worked with the Firelight team for a few years now and many of our customers are utilising and praising their technology," said Trinigy general manager Felix Roeken.

"FMOD not only provides developers with a scalable solution; it supports more platforms than any competing product on the market, including Windows, Linux, iOS and every major video game console, making it the ideal audio solution for our diverse customer base."

www.trinigy.net

After years organically growing a physics and middleware proposition, **Havok** has made its first acquisition to add new technology to its offer.

In fact, the firm has now bought a new start-up originally founded by Havok's creators – the Intel-owned company has acquired Kore Virtual Machine.

Kore was developed by Havok founders Hugh Reynolds and Steven Collins at their new firm New Game Technologies.

The virtual machine technology was specifically built for console games and has already found a home amongst the likes of Sega, Bungie, Lionhead, Masthead Studios, United Front Games, NetDevil and other unnamed teams.

But now it will sit in the Havok portfolio, renamed Havok Script. New Game Technologies, meanwhile is being taken in "a new R&D direction for some time," said Reynolds, CEO.

"We thrive on new product development, so we were delighted when the opportunity came up to place the Kore VM technology with Havok," he said, Silicon Republic reports.

"Without a doubt, Havok is the company that has the best track record in the games industry for supporting customers and delivering optimised cross-platform technology. It's a real win-win result."

www.havok.com

Seattle firm **Sundog Software** has released the latest iteration of its SilverLining weather simulation middleware, version 2.0.

"This new release of SilverLining really takes advantage of what modern consumer-grade computer video cards can do," said Sundog owner Frank Kane.

"We introduce a technique called GPU ray-casting for 3D volumetric clouds that makes really dense cloud layers possible. With SilverLining, software developers can add the widest variety of cloud types and weather conditions to their games and simulators easily and with full physical reality."

Available to trail in a demo package before purchase, the tech is offered with integration codes for game and simulation engines like Ogre 3D, Gamebryo Lightspeed and Carmenta.

"We are offering this upgrade free of charge to our existing customers, so end consumers should start seeing more realistic skies pretty quickly," said Kane.

"We're really proud of the impact our small company is having in the world of computer graphics."

www.sundog-soft.com

Indian studio **Swadesh Animation** has licensed Hansoft project management tools for work across several projects.

"Hansoft has allowed our team to become really successful with Scrum," said Swadesh director Prasenjit Medhi.

"We can now have multiple teams working across multiple projects, ranging from small art sub-projects and mobile phone apps, all the way up to MMOG scale games

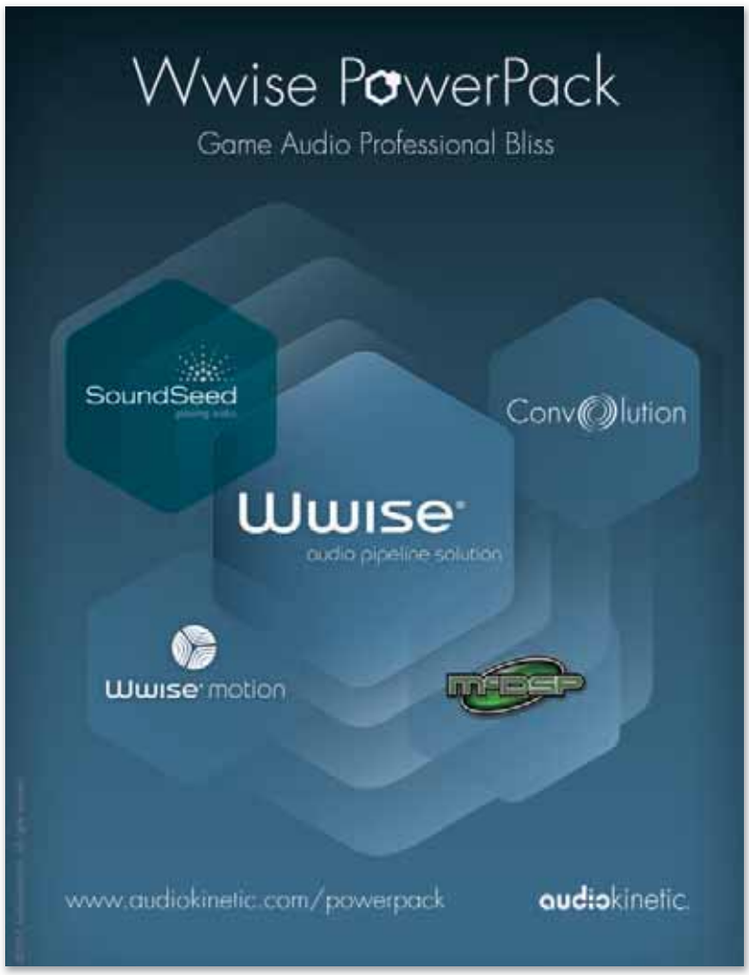
Hansoft CEO Patric Palm described the deal as fairly typical of that which his firm generally finds itself making.

"Many of our customers are in the middle of a project when they move over to Hansoft from their previous tools," he explained.

"Swadesh Animation is working on many exciting projects at the same time, small and big. We are very proud to have them onboard as a new customer."

www.hansoft.se

Audio Kinetic www.audiokinetic.com



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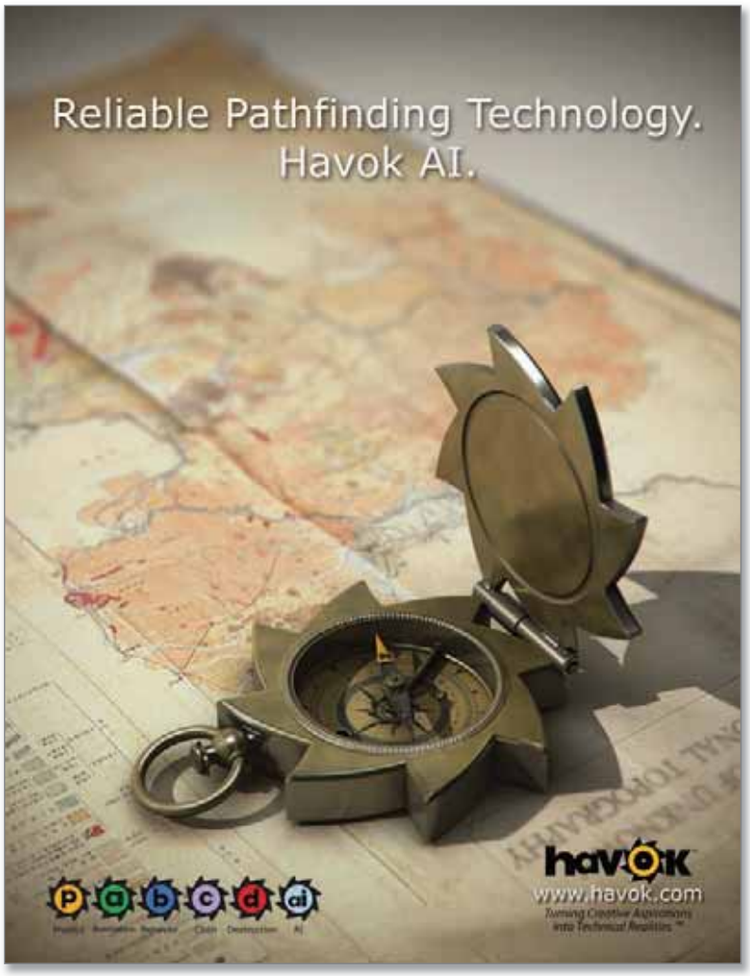

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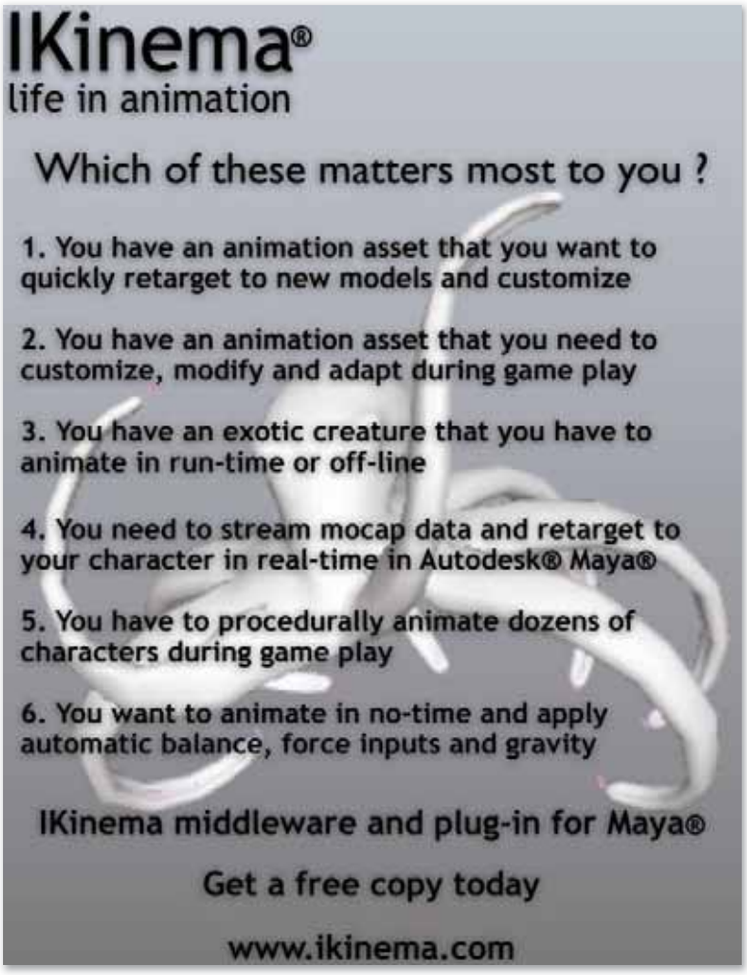
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Tool Spotlight

AUTODESK

TOOL TYPE: GRAPHICS TECHNOLOGY

Founded back in 1982 by John Walker, Autodesk is a design middleware firm focused on 2D and 3D design software for use in fields as varied as architecture, engineering and building construction, manufacturing, media and entertainment. From humble beginings producing its flagship AutoCAD digital modelling solution for 8-bit CP/M and 16-bit operating systems, the company today boasts an extensive list of tech, software and middleware products with applications across myriad industries. This rapid growth has seen the company listed on the NASDAQ-100 index alongside the likes of industry giants Activision-Blizzard and Microsoft.

Headquartered in San Rafael, California, the company is best known within the video games development industry for graphics, modelling and lighting middleware like Maya, Softimage, 3ds Max and Beast. Most of these products are produced by the Autodesk Media and Entertainment division in Montréal, Québec.

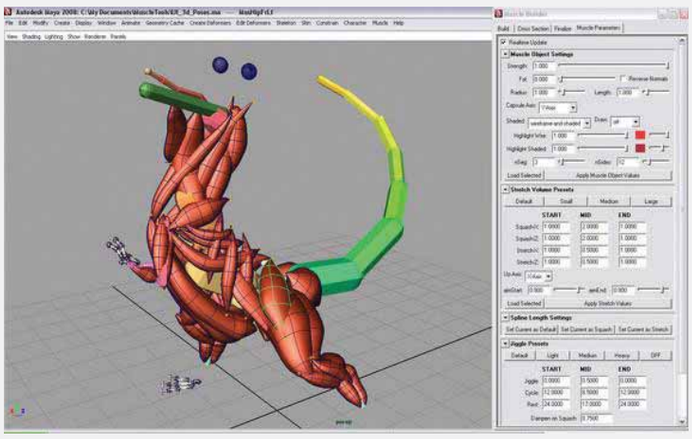
Other products that find themselves frequently licensed for use within games development include Kynapse, the AI and realtime NPC simulations solution, and Maya, a highly popular animation kit.

Since the early part of the decade, Autodesk has enacted a bold policy of acquisitions that has significantly contributed to its highly-regarded catalogue of products and the maintaining of its position at the forefront of design tech innovation across the board.

In 2007, it acquired Skymatter, developer of the digital sculpting and

texture painting software Mudbox. This was followed-up early the following year by the purchase of Paris-based Kynogon, creators of the previously mentioned Kynapse AI middleware. Later in the same year, Autodesk acquired Softimage, developers of the character animation and visual effects application Softimage. The latter purchase alone set Autodesk back $35m, but the level to which it and its many sister-products have granted the company a prolific presence across not only the games industry by the digital entertainment industries in general must surely have returned dividends.

This expansive business policy, combined with a commitment to build upon the quality of the products that it comes into possession of, has seen Autodesk become one of the most widely recognised and used middleware firms operating today. This success was recognised in 2008 when the firm was awarded a position on Fast Company's list of The World's 50 Most Innovative Companies.



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Services News

This month: Hansoft, Pixelbite, Mixamo and NaturalMotion

Hansoft, the Swedish project management and QA software firm, has expanded its production team with the hiring of Bill McGehee in the role of senior production expert.

McGehee will now be responsible for ensuring international studios using Hansoft products will get the most from the software, and increasing their productivity with the software.

McGehee previously worked as senior development director at EA Tiburon, helping to produce titles like *Tiger Woods Online*, *EA Golf Challenge* and *Madden Superstars*. He boasts over 15 years of combined industry experience.

"I am really excited to be joining the dynamic and creative team, here in Uppsala, Sweden," McGehee said.

"I have always seen Hansoft as a progressive tool and company and I look forward to sharing my experiences with top developers around the world and help them taking studio productivity to another level."

www.hansoft.se

Reckless Racing developer Pixelbite has shed some light on its use of Localize Direct's LocDirect.

The Swedish studio, whose previous clients include Microsoft and EA, are among the first adopters of Localize Direct's technology, which promises to better the localisation process for developers as well as publishers.

LocDirect, a system to streamline the process of localising the popular new iOS racing game, is designed to be highly customisable, and can scale to suit the project in development regardless of size.

"Localize Direct's system has catered for every localisation need we've had so far." stated Mattias Olsson, managing director of Pixelbite Games. "It's considered a must have in the suite of development tools we're using today. We highly recommend it to any developer."

"Massive congratulations to Pixelbite Games and their success with *Reckless Racing*. It's an amazing game and I'm glad that we could help the team focus on their core strengths. Their adoption of our middleware ensured that creative talents wouldn't get bogged down with localisation issues." added Michael Souto, Business development director at Localize Direct.

www.pixelbite.se

Mixamo's online catalogue of animations has been custom integrated to work with new character models being built and sold by Daz 3D.

Both groups say that every Mixamo motion is guaranteed to work with any character customised within the DAZ Studio, and claim this can improve productivity by up to 80 per cent and cut costs by 75 per cent.

"The addition of the Mixamo motion collection to our 3D human figures greatly enhances the level of 3D animated content that our community can create," said Dan Farr, DAZ Productions CEO.

"Due to the ease at which users can customise and apply any Mixamo motion to any DAZ 3D character, their ability to create professional animations for their 3D projects increases dramatically."

www.mixamo.com

NaturalMotion has hired Paul Topping as its new VP of sales for EMEA territories.

Topping, whose previous experience includes stints at Criterion, MathEngine and Codemasters, will now be responsible for EMEA product sales and account management at the firm, including for the new Kinect and Move Morpheme modules.

"We are delighted that Paul is joining NaturalMotion – just in time for the upcoming launch of Morpheme 3," said VP of global sales Christian Staack.

"Paul brings with him a wealth of experience in games middleware, as well as a proven track record in introducing new products to market. We've been wanting to work together for some time, so it's great we can finally make this happen."

Topping will now be based at the NaturalMotion head office in Oxford, UK.

"NaturalMotion's products have an enviable position in the games industry. With a triple-A customer list, and with project credits such as *Grand Theft Auto IV* and *Red Dead Redemption*, the company is arguable the industry leader in its field", he said.

"I am thrilled to be joining such a talented team, and to be helping customers realise their creative visions with our products."

www.naturalmotion.com

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Services Spotlight

REALTIMEUK

realtime:uk

Founded in 1996 with the intention of becoming 'the UK's leading CGI studio', Lancashire-based RealtimeUK has built-up a substantial catalogue of top-flight CGI work within the video games industry over the course of the 14 succeeding years.

To date, the company has worked alongside companies such as Disney Interactive Studios, Sega, Codemasters, Microsoft Games Studio, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe and THQ. Concept, design, scripting and storyboarding are all part of the RealtimeUK service, alongside the CGI work, and the company is not shy about its ability to produce imaginative animations in both highly realistic and stylised styles.

This is best evidenced by the range of titles that contain RealtimeUK's work. Renders for Codemaster's *Operation Flashpoint: Red River* and a trailer for *DiRT3* showcase the strong marketing content the firm can create. This is clearly offset by the in-game animation work that RealtimeUK most recently produced for Frontier Developments' family Kinect title *Kinectimals*. A team from RealtimeUK worked with Frontier for 8 months to produce bespoke animations built directly into the *Kinectimals* engine. From the working relationship that was built up during the project, they were also invited to script, storyboard and animate many of the game's cut scenes.

Similar work can be seen on titles as ranging in styles as Disney *Think Fast*, anticipated upcoming Creative Assembly RTS *Shogun 2: Total War*, Freestyle Games' *DJ Hero* and the THQ funded advert for *Stormbirds*.

RealtimeUK rightly boasts about the body of work that it has built up over its 14 years, stating that it is confident that it can supply every CGI requirement, regardless of complexity, by relying on the team of digital artists and animators that makes up the strong arm of its operational outfit.

The confidence that exudes from this statement is matched surely in the quality of the projects which the company has been involved in to date, as well as the quality of the work which it has produced for them. RealtimeUK is a firm whose name appears in interesting places, and the mark that it leaves in those places gives the impression that they will be popping up with much greater frequency over the years to come.

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Training News

This month: Blitz Academy, Independent Games Festival and Tiga

Registration has opened for the **Blitz Academy** open days 2011, Blitz Games Studios annual education out-reach for second, third and final year university students studying games related courses.

The 2011 days will be held on Thursday 24 February, Thursday 10 March and Thursday 17 March.

The open days, which have been running since 2005, offer students a studio tour and the chance to talk to and get feedback from the development staff at Blitz.

Students must complete a work sample to be considered for a place on the open days, but there is no monetary charge. The closing date for work sample submission is Monday January 10th 2011.

"We're extremely proud to announce the sixth year of Open Days from Blitz Game Studios," says Blitz Academy's education liaison manager Kim Blake.

"We'd also like to remind students that these days aren't just aimed at those who are doing games-specific degrees – we positively welcome submissions from those studying maths, computer science, illustration, pure animation and so on – all subjects that teach the skills needed in today's thriving games industry are welcome."

www.blitzgamesstudios.com

Over 280 games have been submitted for approval for the student portion of the 2011 **Independent Games Festival**.

Meanwhile, the main IGF contest – now in its thirteenth year – took in a record 400 game entries across a range of platforms from iPhone to DS, PSP and Android devices.

Yet it was the IGF Student Competition that achieved record growth for 2011, with its 283 entrants marking a 47 per cent rise over last year's 193.

The 2011 event also took a record 607 game submissions across the IGF Main Competition, Student Showcase and IGF Mobile competitions.

All 2011 submissions will be distributed to more than 150 notable industry judges for evaluation. Finalists will be announced in January 2011.

The 2011 festival, part of the larger GDC, will return to San Francisco's Moscone Convention Center Monday, February 28th to Friday, March 4th, 2011.

www.igf.com

Kingston University and the University of Staffordshire have both joined the UK games development industry trade body Tiga.

Kingston has this year launched six new courses which it says are designed to address the UK's digital media skills gap, and were created with SCEE, Samsung Design Europe and Dreamworks.

"The new courses are all about closing the gap between education and industry and ensuring students leave university with the skills they need to work in the digital media sector," said Digital Media Kingston development coordinator Karen Cham.

"We are reaching out to the games industry, not only for guidance, but to create a dialogue between the two worlds."

The University of Staffordshire offers a range of video games development related courses, including those for programming, audio, design and AI.

"At Staffordshire University we have one of the widest ranges of games degree courses in the country," said Bobbie Fletcher, head of the games technology group at the university.

"By offering an extensive selection we allow our students the chance gain deep specialist knowledge in a specific area of games development. We have found that this way we equip our students with the skills they require to leave University and go straight into the industry."

Tiga CEO Dr Richard Wilson welcomed the news, and its wider meaning for the trade body.

"Tiga is proud to now be representing over 25 universities and educational institutes," he said.

"We hope that by bringing industry and academia together we can work to ensure the UK games industry has access to the brightest and the best games graduates."

www.tiga.org

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For more quotes from ex-students, examples of student work and syllabus information please visit www.mscgames.com.
PhD and BSc study also available.
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The Big Picture

The Blitz twins were spotted at the UK Kinect launch. We like to think the following exchange occurred:

Philip: "Andrew! Take off that ridiculous outfit!"

Andrew: "I'm Philip".

REWIND

A look back at a time when things were simpler for developers

A year in video games: 1995

■ Gunpei Yokoi's Virtua Boy debuts to an underwhelmed and occasionally nauseous public. It's 'true 3D' visuals inspire less than 800,000 sales. Today's 3D evangelists should take note.

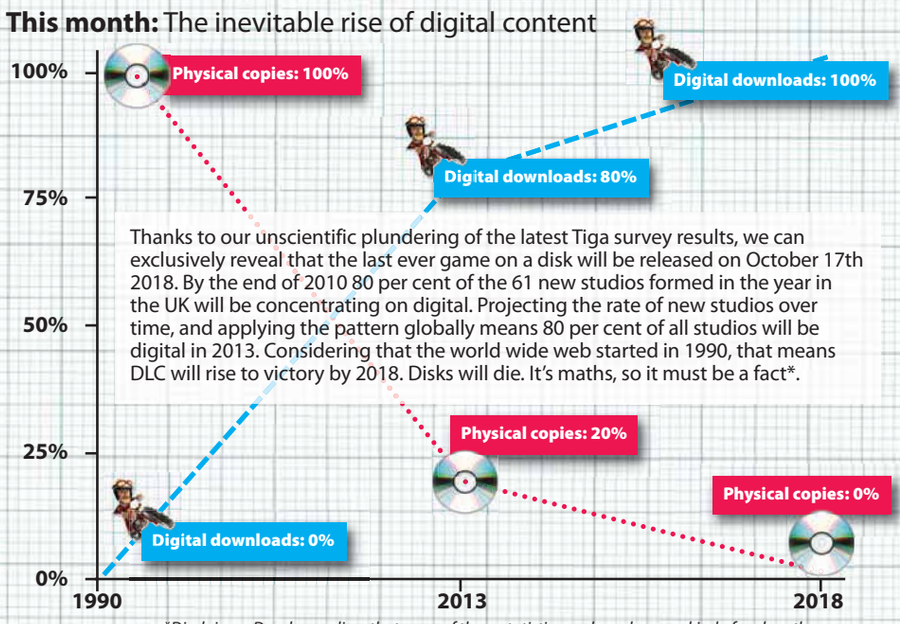
■ A monster is born as the first Electronic Entertainment Expo takes place in Los Angeles.

■ Once upon a time there were three developers, Greg Zeschuk, Ray Muzyka and Augustine Yip. They set up narrative-lead games studio BioWare. You know the rest.

Wrong Numbers

Stats can be misleading. Forward-project the trends from November's numbers and the results show a misguided vision of the future

This month: The inevitable rise of digital content



Thanks to our unscientific plundering of the latest Tiga survey results, we can exclusively reveal that the last ever game on a disk will be released on October 17th 2018. By the end of 2010 80 per cent of the 61 new studios formed in the year in the UK will be concentrating on digital. Projecting the rate of new studios over time, and applying the pattern globally means 80 per cent of all studios will be digital in 2013. Considering that the world wide web started in 1990, that means DLC will rise to victory by 2018. Disks will die. It's maths, so it must be a fact*.

Disclaimer: Develop realises that none of these statistics are based on any kind of real maths

Devipedia

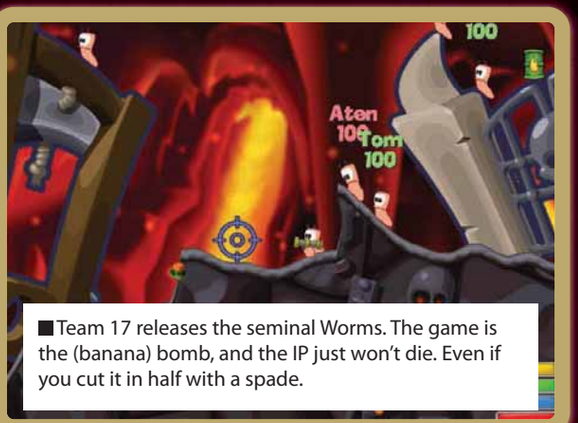
Dissecting the hyperbole of games development

MMPAGs

[Massively multiplayer play along games] (emm-pags) Acnm.

What 'they' think it means:
A 'groundbreaking format' that lets 'multiplatform broadcasters further extend entertainment ecosystem' and increase 'viewer immersion'. Users of MMPAGs can 'interact with the traditional viewing experience' by playing a game thematically tied and in synchronisation with a TV broadcast as it is aired, thus joining 'the next generation of in-show interactive TV'.

What it really means:
You can play a branded browser game at the same time the TV version show airs, which you've always been able to do; it's just got a new acronym that jumps on the MMO bandwagon a few years too late. It smells like misguided TV execs have got over excited in a brainstorming session and coined the term to stake a claim to the long-touted fusion of television and video games. They probably had their consultants help them.



■ Team 17 releases the seminal Worms. The game is the (banana) bomb, and the IP just won't die. Even if you cut it in half with a spade.

■ Sony launches the PlayStation in the US and Europe. You know Sony – it's the company that makes the TVs and radios, and they want to make gaming cool. Some chance.

develop FORWARD PLANNER

February 2011

Recruitment Special
Our annual look at the jobs market includes: Advice for CVs, portfolios and interviews; per-discipline guidance on getting a promotion; the education sector; our salary survey; 30 Under 30 – the rising stars of games development; and much more.

Regional Focus: Cambridge
A look at current developments and new stories from the historic University Town.

Events:
Casual Connect – February 8th to 10th, 2011
DICE – February 9th to 11th, 2011

March 2011

QA & Localisation
The final phase of a game's production can be its most crucial step to global success – we talk to leading experts in testing, compliance and translation.

Regional Focus: West Coast USA
From Seattle to San Diego via Los Angeles and San Francisco, we examine Western game development's heartland.

Events:
GDC – February 28th to March 4th, 2011
Game Connection – March 1st to 3rd, 2011

April 2011

Mocap & Facial Animation
Every facet of character animation examined, from limb animation to lip-synching.

Regional Focus: Oxford
We examine the studios and technology companies in this key UK cluster.

May 2011

With *Develop 100* Insertion
Audio
A fresh look at the music and audio for the games sector, including in-house teams through to outsourcers.

Regional Focus: Scotland
Studios from start-ups to commercial powerhouses profiled.

June 2011

Middleware
Trends and new releases in third party tech, tools and engines.

Regional Focus: Nordic
We look at games development across Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark), Iceland and Finland

Event:
E3 – June 7th to 9th, 2011

July 2011

Regional Focus: Guildford
One of UK games dev's many famed clusters goes under the Develop microscope

Events:
Develop Conference - 19 - 21 July, 2011

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THE FAQ PAGE: Warren Spector

Develop grills respected figures from the global development sector…

Above: Warren Spector has been developing games for 27 years

Who are you what do you do?
I'm Warren Spector and I make video games, and I've been making those games for around 27 years.

What are you currently working on?
We've just finished Disney's *Epic Mickey*.

What was the first game you worked on?
The first electronic game I worked on was either *Ultima VI* or *Space Rogue*, but I honesty can't remember which came first. But I started out on tabletop at Steve Jackson Games, and the first game that I worked on was a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure called *Thing in the Darkness*. In fact, that was a magazine game so perhaps that doesn't count. The first real game I worked on was *Toon*, a cartoon role-playing game which shipped in 1984.

What was the first game you remember playing?
I used to play the old board game *Candy Land*, but I'm not sure that counts. The first tabletop game I played was Steve Jackson's *Ogre*. The first electronic game I played I can't really remember, but the first one that really made an impression was *Star Raiders* on the Atari 800. I'd played others before that, but they were just past times. *Star Raiders* changed my life.

> ***"I'm disappointed by the fact we still focus solely on combat mechanics and rendering techniques at the expense of other things."***
>
> Warren Spector

What was the game you've played most recently, and have you enjoyed it?
I'm playing the new *Scribblenauts* game right now. I find the *Scribblenauts* games miraculous. I was talking on a panel with Jeremiah Slaczka who runs the studio that creates those games, and I was saying that what they do seems impossible. He just looked at me with a knowing smile. The rat! He wouldn't reveal his secrets.

What is your favourite ever game?
That's an easy one for me, but I will have to give you two answers. My favourite narrative game is *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* on the SNES, although I have it and have played it on every platform its ever been on. My desert island game, if I could only play one game for the rest of my life, would absolutely be *Tetris*.

What disappoints you about the games industry today?
I'm disappointed by the fact that we still focus solely on combat mechanics and rendering techniques, at the expense of other things we could be devoting energy and effort to. We could be focusing on non-combat AI and making conversation as compelling as fighting for a change. Wouldn't that be great? We could be focusing on making storytelling truly interactive. We just focus on prettier pictures and flashier graphics attached to more impressive combat scenarios, and honestly, that just bores me.

What do you enjoy about the games industry?
There are two things. One is that I am constantly surrounded by people who are more intelligent than me. I really do learn something new every day. It's just incredible to imagine what we get to learn. The other great thing is that every day when I get into the office I see something nobody else has ever seen.

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